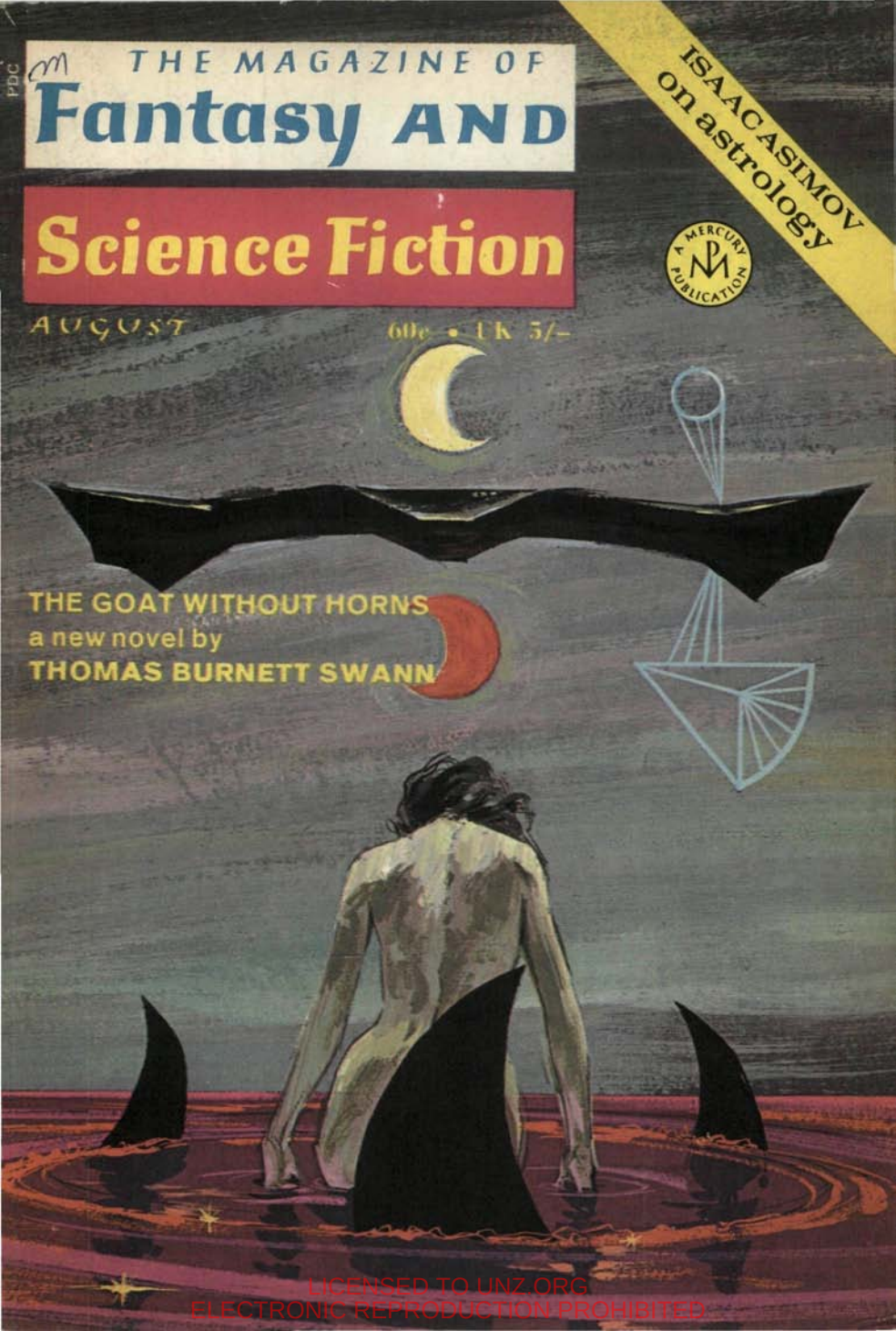

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

AUGUST • 21ST YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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Thomas Burnett Swann was recognized as one of the field's superior fantasists with the publication of "Where Is the Bird of Fire," a novelet which "I expected to please no one except my Muse, since it mixed history with mythology and humans with demigods and introduced a heroine who had green hair and pointed ears. But it found a publisher in England and encouraged me to write further historical hybrids," (including "The Manor of Roses," F&SF, November 1966). Dr. Swann's latest story has a more contemporary, though no less colorful, background, a dolphin for narrator, and, in the words of that narrator, "the story is monstrous at times, chilling as a confrontation with a tiger shark, and the ending – well, you shall judge for yourselves . . ."

The Goat Without Horns

by Thomas Burnett Swann

(FIRST OF TWO PARTS)

Publisher's Introduction to the Second Edition

THE following history contains events so incredible, so seemingly manufactured by an overimaginative if not a downright melodramatic novelist, that the publisher feels called upon to remind the public of several significant facts:

First, that verbal communication was established with the dolphin—more specifically that species of dolphin known as *Tursiops truncatus*—within the last year. Sounds which for centuries had appeared to human ears to be no more than a series of squeaks and snorts from a playful animal were in truth a highly developed language with a syntax comparable to that of Japanese and a vocabulary as rich and often as confusing as Etruscan. Furthermore, the dolphin—that is, the brighter members of the species—had been understanding the con-

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versation of men since the time of Aristotle and, with the good-humored tolerance of their race, waiting patiently for him to return the compliment.

Second, once communication was achieved, dolphins not only conversed with men but revealed what many marine biologists had long suspected, that they possessed a literature—oral, to be sure, since flippers and flukes do not lend themselves to wielding pens—as fluid in style as their own motions in the water.

Third, that this literature, which was passed from generation to generation by infinite repetitions, generally took the form not of epics, nor of plays, nor of poems, but of histories. One might expect so playful a race to write comedies crackling with epigrams in the manner of Oscar Wilde. Such was not the case. Except for two monumental histories, one of the entire dolphin race since their mass migration from the land to the sea forty-five million years ago, the other of the human race since men began to build boats, it was the custom of each dolphin clan to compose, singly or in concert, an account of an episode or episodes concerning their own particular history. The account was intimate and personal—not a broad record of the entire clan, written with the sweep and grandeur of a Gibbon—but events involving a few or perhaps a single individual, seen, recorded, and evaluated through the microscope rather than the telescope; microcosms, not macrocosms.

Fourth, when we presented such a history from the 1870's in our first edition last year, soberly labeling its nature on the cover and in our introduction, we were instantly accused of attempting to perpetrate yet another Gothic novel on a credulous public. Our Victorian dolphin narrator was variously identified with Mary Dewart, Victoria Bolt, and Daphne Duvalier. The ladies heatedly proclaimed that even if they had chosen to conceal their identities under pen names (and why should such salable names be concealed?), they would hardly have masqueraded as a fish—well, a mammal, but a fishy-looking mammal all the same.

However, the authenticity of the book was attested by the renowned linguist, Julius Whipplejohn, who himself had anonymously transcribed the tale from the great-grandson of the dolphin narrator; and by author Thomas Burnett Swann, who had edited and attempted to clarify the roughnesses inevitable in a communication between a mammal that lived in the sea and spoke largely through his blowhole and a mammal that lived on the land and, assisted by tongue, teeth, and lips, spoke through his mouth. In a word, last year's "Gothic novel"

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is now widely recognized as a legitimate history of certain extraordinary events transpiring on a Caribbean island in the Nineteenth Century. Gothic perhaps in the sense of grotesque, macabre, inexplicable, but fully as historical as those larger grotesqueries, the Inquisition and the Salem witch hunts.

A word of caution. The island in question, though bearing superficial resemblances to both Tobago and Saba, has not been identified and, according to the great-grandson of the narrator, was totally submerged by the volcanic eruption of Soufriére in 1902.

I

I ADDRESS my history not to my fellow dolphins, even though, following the custom of my race, I will repeat the words to my first son until he has learned them by rote and passed them in turn to his own first son. My history? Charlie's history, I ought to say, for he is the subject and the hero, and it is to him and for him that I write, with the admiration of a warrior for a comrade-in-arms, and the adoration of one who swims but would like to walk, for one who walks like a god.

There was a time, earlier than our earliest recorded history, when dolphins lived on the shore, and walked on limbs which only later became flippers and dwelled like rabbits in warrens or beavers in branch-built lodges. Our race eventually undertook a gradual migration into the sea, first becoming amphibians like frogs, then entirely sea-dwelling but still air-breathing. Perhaps our lives on shore had grown too difficult and too dangerous. Perhaps there were creatures which pierced our tender skin with giant claws or savage beaks, descended from trees to make a breakfast of us or emerged from the earth to drag us to their cackling young. Or perhaps we simply became restless and wished to explore a color different from green, a texture unlike dirt, a motion smoother than walking. For as you know we are the most adventurous of creatures, following the Gulf Stream north to Newfoundland every year and risking abrupt drops in temperature and bouts with sharks for the sheer joy of change, surprise, unpredictability.

I, for one, however, lamented my ancestors' decision to forsake the land for the damp, enveloping cleanliness of the sea. Now, if I could reconvert my flippers, I would instantly clamber back onto the shore and revel among the fields of cacao and the forests of mahogany, quite satisfied to walk or climb instead of swim. What did the sea ever bring me except the loss of my mother to a giant hammerhead? Men go into the sea

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to cleanse themselves of dirt, but how I would love to clamber ashore and roll on a sandy beach! My friends called me Gloomer because I would rather brood in a sea cave than gambol and frolic like most of my lighthearted race.

Until the death of my mother, at least I managed an occasional somersault and a halfhearted nip of a shapely pubescent female.

But Mama saw through my pretense. "Son, you don't take after your family at all. As you well know, my lovers—and I have enjoyed more than any dolphin south of the Bahamas—call me Merry Mama, and your own dear father, the Great Triton rest his soul, could jolly a sea turtle out of a hundred-year gloom. Where have we failed you, dear?"

I deliberated. I was not one to make a quick answer. "You haven't failed me, Mama. I expect it's because I'm waiting."

"For a comely young cow?"

"I don't really know. Something. Someone. *A difference.*"

The first difference was the death of my mother, and I thought: This accounts for my gloom. The shadow of her death, like an inky cloud exuded by a squid, stretched backwards as well as forwards.

The second difference was Charlie.

Obviously I did not witness all of his adventures on the island of Oleandra, since many took place on the land instead of in the water. But Charlie told me much of what I could not see, and the rest I surmised—his thoughts, some of his actions, the facets of a character which seemed to me saintly and human at the same time; though being as modest as he was lovable, he saw himself as rather an ordinary fellow and blamed himself for some of the horrors which overtook his friends. You see, the story is monstrous at times, as chilling as a confrontation with a tiger shark, as unlikely as an octopus or a narwhal, and the ending—well, you shall judge for yourselves.

The shark which had killed my mother had not survived her, if that was any consolation. The leader of our herd, the Old Bull, had finished him with lethal blows to his underside, and afterwards the herd had been very solicitous of me. Not that I was a calf. I was five years old—in human terms, about eighteen. I was old enough to fend for myself, and when the herd skirted Oleandra, I decided to leave their company and linger near the little volcanic island which looked like an upright pine cone. My intuition—and a dolphin without intuition is like a man without reason; we call it our third ear—had not yet warned me.

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They were greatly concerned at my decision. Dolphins are affectionate, familial creatures. Most of them are happiest in a herd. They considered my youth, my sorrow, and my inexperience, and they all but insisted that I follow the Gulf Stream north with them.

The Old Bull, a practical fellow of thirty ripe years, had the last word. It was worth heeding.

"Sharks. Too many around the island. Must be something in the water they like to eat."

"Well," I said gloomily, "now there will be two somethings. I would make a tasty morsel for a hammerhead."

"Indeed you would," said the Old Cow. "You've been gorging yourself out of grief."

"I may be plump," I pouted, "and irresistible to hammerheads. But I'm still staying. Give me a little more length and a little less girth, and let the sharks beware!" Suppose I battled and lost. What had I to lose except my life and my gloom?

When the herd reluctantly left me to my whims, I drifted, grieved, and ate, catching unwary mullets by the thousand because I felt less alone when my four stomachs were occupied; following a ship for a few miles out of habit without even noticing if the sailors were waving and throwing me fish.

Oleandra was a curious island: a big volcanic cone, long since dead, its outer slopes sere from the beating of winds or gnarled with stunted, twisted sea grapes, its protected crater lush with oleanders and frangipani and cupping a lagoon as green as a mermaid's hair. The Old Bull had shown me an underground passage which led from the sea into the lagoon.

"If the sharks get too troublesome," he had said, "you can always nip into the lagoon and hope they won't follow your scent. The entrance from the sea is hidden by rocks, and sharks, remember, have notoriously bad eyes."

The days passed, perhaps a week, perhaps a month, with no dimming of sorrow and no sharpening of any appetite except for food. And then, in the mist of days, I saw a ship, and time resumed for me . . .

She had anchored a few hundred yards from the shore, and she was not one of those island-hopping schooners with barnacled hulls and crusty captains. She was a schooner, it is true, but bright and red and slim of line, with sails as gossamer as the wings of a flying fish. She belonged to Elizabeth Meynell, the English lady who owned the island and lived in a large red house inside the crater. Once a month, the Old Bull had said, this schooner brought her mail and supplies from Martinique.

There was no dock or jetty. The waters which ringed the is-

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land, always choppy, were often so turbulent that anything built by man would dissolve into foam. There was neither a beach nor a harbor, but a tiny cove where Carib Indians were lowering a dugout canoe from a low shelf of rock and pushing off from shore. The paddlers—three Caribs with black slits in their cheeks and countenances to match their barbarous adornments—paddled rapidly if sullenly out to the schooner and, on the leeward side, attached their canoe to the larger vessel by ropes like a sharksucker to a shark. A single passenger swayed his tortuous way down a rope ladder and prepared to step into the dugout.

It was my first sight of Charlie.

A dolphin on the surface of the water can see with perfect clarity anything in front of him, beside him, or under him, but because of the position of his eyes it is difficult for him to see anything higher than sixteen or seventeen feet above him—a high-flying sea gull, for example—without actually leaping into the air. I could not see the top of the schooner's mast. But I could see the deck and the passenger as he began to descend the ladder. I might have thought him a sailor lad from his brawny hands and his stocky frame. But his face—well, it was downright archangelic. Not *angelic*. Not simpering and pallidly virtuous, nor suggestive of harps and gossamer, but strong and kind and, I suspected, capable of a martial fire when directed from the heavens. In a word, a young Gabriel or Michael.

My immediate reaction needs some defending. Perhaps, being a male, even though a dolphin, I was instinctively jealous of his looks, just as human males resent a man who is too handsome. Perhaps I had been so gloomy and petulant for so long that I needed to work some mischief. Perhaps—indeed, probably—I was listening to my third ear and I hoped instinctively to frighten him away from Oleandra for both of our sakes because I sensed that he was somehow—sacrificial—and I was soon to become inseparable from his fate.

At any rate, I gave the canoe a forward nudge and Charlie dropped not into it but beside it into the water. Then I surprised myself by a piece of sheerest perfidy. I skulked under the surface and nudged him as if I were a shark foraging for dinner. In the murky waters it was hard for him to recognize me as a relatively small dolphin. But he did not panic; somewhere, he had learned that under shark attack you try to remain calm, you never flail and hit and kick like a drowning man. With quick, deliberate movements, getting, by the way, no help from the Caribs, he seized the gunwale and simultaneously

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hoisted and rolled himself into the canoe. Only then did he peer into the water to see what kind of attacker he had escaped. When he spied a four-foot adolescent dolphin instead of a twelve-foot tiger shark, he began to laugh. He was not angry, he was not embarrassed, he was amused and not with me but himself. It was a laugh of self-deprecation, amiable and infectious.

I circled the boat, feeling and trying to look remorseful but knowing that most men cannot read our expressions, all of which they generally mistake for a grin. Charlie, oblivious to his dripping clothes, was watching my antics with continued good humor. But when the Caribs pushed off from the schooner, someone called to him from the deck. It was the captain, a bearded, square-set bear of man with a gruffness which was really kindness.

"Charlie boy, I give you one month on that island and you'll be swimming to meet us! Remember we sail from Martinique the first of every month with mail and supplies."

Charlie. So that was his name. It was right for him. Charles would have been too formal. Charlie, unlike Billy, a sailor's name, sounded young and friendly and just nautical enough for someone who had sailed the Atlantic without actually being a sailor.

"I've signed on for a year," Charlie said, "and a year it'll be."

"You haven't met the young lady yet," said the captain, faintly greeted by a snicker from some of the crew. "Your—er—pupil, did her mother say? She usually comes with the Caribs to meet us."

But the Caribs had no intention of pausing for conversation. They had not greeted the passenger nor offered to help him when he fell into the water. Now, they ignored his presence in their boat and rowed as if his ship were carrying rats infected with bubonic plague.

Charlie raised his hand in a last, decisive good-bye—a year's good-bye—and then he looked at me, breaking into a grin when he saw me still frantically circling the boat to attract his attention and, yes, to stare at him.

He was a youth about my own age (in human terms, that is—eighteen or nineteen). His face was ruddy and healthy and English, and his stalwart frame, middling in height, planted him firmly on earth and within range of friendly overtures from an unethereal dolphin.

Looking up from me, he examined the island which was now within a hundred yards. He tried to look excited; he tried to look anticipatory, as if remarkable adventures awaited him. But a sadness darkened his face. No, "darkened" is hardly accurate. Charlie's gold was without shadows. "Suffused" is the proper word, with its

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hint of light even in sadness. He was not so much coming somewhere as he was leaving somewhere, and forgetting—or trying to forget—a lost, loved person. I knew then that we were destined to become friends. We were divided by the barrier which separates the sea from the shore but linked by a kindred loss and a kindred need. I swam behind the canoe almost until it was beached—or rather lifted out of the water by waiting Caribs—since, as I have said, there was no beach.

After Charlie had tried to drop into the canoe and dropped by mistake into the water, his luggage and Mrs. Meynell's mail had been lowered with more success into the canoe. With much grunting and scowling the Caribs proceeded to strap a small trunk and a carton brimming with books onto the backs of two burros, which would carry them up the precipitous wall of the crater, over the top, and down to the Red House inside the crater.

I did not want to see the last of Charlie. I felt cheated; indeed, I felt outraged and cursed the Great Triton under my breath. My punishment was prompt. One of the Caribs began to pelt me with stones. Of course he missed; the reactions of a dolphin, even a plump dolphin, are instantaneous. I ducked agilely under the water and out of range. But Charlie saw the action. He did not hit the man; he did something much more demeaning to the man's pride. He gave him a prompt, powerful shove, and the Carib, though taller by a foot and pounds heavier, landed on his back. When he scrambled to his feet, Charlie repeated his shove without bloodying his fists and without once being touched by the Carib's flailing hands. This time the man's friends restrained him with the gibberish, part original Carib, part African, and part English, which passes for a language. It is a gibberish which I have tried to learn, but I sensed that the man was being counseled to bide his time—the English phrase Goat without Horns appeared several times—while Charlie stood his ground like a boy fresh from Eton at the battle of Waterloo.

He gazed back at me and raised his hand in a gesture of farewell. I leaped out of the water and spun in the air. Men always expect us to perform antics, however melancholy we may feel, and if I had to frolic to hold his attention, I would turn a triple somersault. He called after the Caribs to wait for him. They glowered and halted the burros. Charlie was not to be hurried. I eased so close to the bank that I scraped my skin on a projecting root, but I gave no thought to the scrape when Charlie, with beautiful courtliness, leaned over the water, touched my head, and allowed his

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fingers to linger as if to say, "There is no strangeness in your wet, dark skin to me." He was communicating in the only possible way at that time. After all, what else does one do with a dolphin when one does not understand his language? Shake his flipper? I said good-bye. To Charlie the words must have seemed a raucous squeak, but he guessed my intention.

"You can't understand me," he said (and I understanding every word!), "but I think we will meet again. Good friends are not to be parted for long."

The Caribs, needless to say, had not waited for him; they were driving the burros up the slope and strewing Charlie's books behind them. With a decidedly unethereal oath, he gathered the books and overtook the strewers, who stopped beating the burros. Until they had left the range of my vision, I watched them ascend that windblown, tree-gnarled slope where clinging was a part of climbing.

Then I set out to find the opening which led into the lagoon.

II

Now I must tell you about Charlie, about him before he came to Oleandra and why he came; about the grief which sent him wandering to the islands instead of continuing at Cambridge. Historians are allowed to digress about their heroes and villains, and my digression, as you will see, helps to explain why I made him the hero of my history. You may wonder how I, a dolphin, presume to speak knowledgeably about an England and a queen I have never seen and an age which I have seen only from the sea. My teacher in such matters, my collaborating historian, was Charlie. Our methods of collaboration were necessarily unconventional since, for a long time, Charlie was unaware that I understood and remembered his English, and remembered it with the clarity and exactitude of a race whose literature is oral instead of written.

Charlie was a boy who, expressly created to love, found himself suddenly bereft of love. He did not remember his father, who had died, a civil servant, in India, when Charlie and his twin brother Kenneth were infants in London, but his mother was parent, guardian, and goddess, and he never thought to lament the lack of a father. When she sent her sons to Marlborough at the age of twelve, it was not to be rid of them but to educate them, and they hurried to rejoin her in London for every holiday including that cornucopia of holidays, the summer. In short, she was a mother who would have liked to dote but who forced herself for the good of her sons to appear

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merely warm, loving, and affectionate; and she was blessed by sons who judged all other women by her standards, her grace, courtesy, and most of all compassion, and could not find her equal.

Charlie was a lighthearted boy, because sadness must be learned, and for nineteen years he had no teachers. Then, he was taught supremely well. After Marlborough he and Kenneth had completed a year at Cambridge, and Charlie had gone to spend a summer weekend with a friend at Chichester. He was summoned by messenger to London, where he learned that both his mother and his brother had contracted typhoid fever, the same disease which had killed the Prince Consort and driven Victoria into a decade of mourning.

They died the next day and Charlie was inconsolable. He could not foresee an end to his grief; he did not want to die but he did not want to live. He could not escape his own identity, his own remembrances, but at least he could escape his country and the places where he most remembered his mother and Kenneth. He decided to travel. He stood heir to a moderate fortune: in other words he possessed the means to leave England. He approached his mother's solicitor, the man who would handle his estate until he came of age, and received the assurance of a generous allowance which would allow him to travel as far as he chose and to any country of his choice.

Two months, one day, and eleven hours after the death of his mother and Kenneth, he saw an advertisement in the London *Times* which promised distance and change and a measure of welcome challenge:

"Wanted—a young man between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, of genteel connections, presentable appearance, and classical education. Cambridge or Oxford preferred. Duties: To tutor the daughter of Mrs. Elizabeth Meynell of the Red House, Oleandra Island, British West Indies. Interested parties please consult Mrs. Meynell's solicitor, James Long of Long, Snedley, and Barrows, 23 Grosevnor Park, between the hours of nine and eleven on Tuesday, November 3."

A reader of Gothic novels might have found presentiments of doom in a name like the Red House—blood, plagues, Poe's "Masque of the Red Death"—but Charlie, though his Celtic fancy did in fact possess a Gothic strain, thought at once of the poet and painter William Morris, who had built a medieval manor house by that name and been imitated in England and, apparently, as far as the West Indies.

He arrived at 8:30 and found himself already preceded by a

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dozen young men in various stages of confidence, impatience, and anxiety. He was greeted by a woman of indeterminate years, fixed smile, and skirt so huge and flaring that Charlie expected her to float out of the window like a hot-air balloon. She directed him to an overstuffed chair which was trimmed with red silk tassels. Feeling altogether swallowed by the chair, which was large enough to hold Queen Victoria and most of her children at the same time, he awaited his turn with the impatience of one to whom inactivity had become a torment. There had been a time when he could enjoy equally a cricket match or an hour of contemplation under an alder tree. But now to contemplate meant to remember, and he sometimes found tears running down his cheeks when he was riding a train or shaving in front of the mirror which he had once shared with Kenneth.

He had a long wait. Apparently each young man was questioned at great length, and Charlie began to despair of winning a position for which one must be examined as if one were sitting for a fellowship at Cambridge. But one by one his predecessors filed from the office, and not a single expression radiated victory.

Charlie noticed that several boys appeared to have been rejected becuase they lacked presentability. Was he himself presentable? He and Kenneth, identical twins, had decided that they were not tall enough to cut a dashing figure in the world of society, and they had used this presumed deficiency to evade invitations garnered for them by their mother. Otherwise, looks had not concerned them. Mirrors, it seemed to Charlie, were for shaving and not preening. True, he had sometimes been complimented by young ladies on his "Byronic nose" and his "hair like daffodils." But at nineteen his experience was limited with the opposite sex, and who could trust the fulsome compliments of those simpletons with whom he waltzed and whom, through his mother's urging and in the company of their own mothers, he called on in their salons and gardens?

At last his turn had come. The secretary nodded toward a door whose heavy oak paneling looked about as inviting as that to the office of the headmaster at Marlborough, whose favorite adage had been, "Cane a boy once a month. It's as necessary as exercise and sound diet."

When Charlie entered the room, he felt a return of confidence. It suffered from an excess not of austerity but of opulence. Following the general taste of the day, and ignoring the salutary influence of John Ruskin and William Morris, the walls were crowded with gilt-framed pic-

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tures—a Gainsborough here, a Reynolds there—and elsewhere a host of stiffly posed family portraits. He had to weave his way among rosewood tables, which he momentarily expected to collapse under such bric-a-brac as wax flowers under glass, cuckoo clocks, and candlesticks. Still, for its style, it seemed both expensive and respectable, and Mr. Lane was known to represent some of the oldest families in London.

The solicitor wheezed an unintelligible hello (or was he simply coughing?) and proceeded to look him up and down with embarrassing intensity and to make notes, unconsciously muttering the words that he recorded in a small book with covers of tooled leather.

"Height—middling." Such a lacklustre adjective! A simple "tall" would have resounded with dignity; even a nondescript "medium" would have been acceptable.

"Build—sturdy. Good at wrestling, I should say."

Charlie was poised to admit that he did indeed like to wrestle when he remembered that Mr. Lane was not asking a question and in fact was probably not aware of his own muttering.

"Face—handsome but manly. Not in the least effeminate. Not one of your pretty boys."

Handsome indeed! That was a revelation, though Charlie did not particularly care unless his face helped him to get the position, which was growing more attractive the more difficult it seemed of attainment.

"Now sit down, my young friend. Relax and we'll have a little chat." Mr. Lane, it appeared, had not been rude when examining Charlie like a hog at a county fair. He had simply been following the instructions of his client.

"Let me explain the situation. The advertisement in the *Times* was cryptic, to say the least. Mrs. Meynell worded it, by the way. To put it bluntly, she is a lady of enormous wealth and occasional eccentricities who some years ago lost her husband while cruising through the Indies on their yacht. She did not choose to return to England. She chose to bring England to her. She bought an island—an entire island, which she renamed Oleandra—it had been called Shark Island by the natives. She imported overseers and materials from London, and built a house on the style of William Morris. His Red House, don't you know. You *do* know, don't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Lane. I went to Marlborough."

"Ah, a fellow alumnus. I'll wager they remember Morris well at his old school. At any rate she was left with an infant girl who is now at an age when her mother wishes her to be tutored in subjects which in my own youth—and Mrs. Meynell's, I might add, she's a lady of

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some forty-five or fifty years—were thought unsuitable for young ladies, and rightly so. Some of these newfangled sciences. Bad enough for a boy, but Mrs. Meynell insists on them for her daughter. Geology. And biology. Can you imagine? *With emphasis on marine life.* Mrs. Meynell's own words. And that far-fetched nonsense about the apes. Evolution. I don't even like to say the word. It makes one feel so—simian. I trust you finished your studies at Cambridge or Oxford?"

A lesser school, it seemed, was beyond consideration.

Charlie spoke staunchly, though with a sinking—no, a sunken—heart. "I only had one year at Cambridge. You see, I'm not quite twenty." The advertisement had implied a degree and expressly stipulated an age. Sheer presumption had brought Charlie to the interview, and now, at the moment of reckoning, he refused to be cowed.

"How close to twenty?"

"Eleven months and one week."

"A bit of a gap, but we might stretch a point there. It's the education Mrs. Meynell is really concerned about. You weren't, I take it, expelled?"

"No. My grades were more than satisfactory. I won the Chancellor's Medal for the best poem, in fact." It was an annual college honor in which Tennyson as an undergraduate at Cambridge had long ago anticipated him with a very bad poem. "It's just that I—I lost my mother, and also my brother who was with me in school, and I want to leave Cambridge for a while. Come back and finish in a few years, perhaps. But not now."

Mr. Lane patted Charlie on the shoulder. One would not have thought him capable of such tenderness. There must be tears streaming down my cheeks, thought Charlie, longing for a chance to mop surreptitiously with a handkerchief. "I understand, my boy, I understand. But we mustn't stint Mrs. Meynell and her daughter, must we? If she wants biology with emphasis on marine life, we must give her sharks and dolphins and cuttlefish, mustn't we? Are you scientifically inclined?"

"I studied geology at Marlborough. We made a lot of field trips. All those rolling downs make good digging. And you learn some archaeology along with the geology. But biology—I've always liked the, sea and what's in it, but I'm not learned in the subject. I can learn, however. I can read on the voyage to Oleandra."

"Personally," muttered the solicitor, "I don't know what good biology *or* geology will do a young girl in the first place. In my father's youth, he was taught that the world was formed in the year 4004 B.C., Followed in a few days or years, depending on how

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long you reckon a Biblical day, by Adam and Eve. And that was that. Things are so much more complicated since we've begun to question the Scriptures. At any rate I think we can pass you in the sciences. Now then. We come to the most important subject of all. Mrs. Meynell particularly emphasized poetry. 'Don't send me a young man who calls Wordsworth Wadsworth,' she cautioned me. Seems she has an inordinate love for the stuff—er, art. You say you write it, but do you know the masters? Suppose we give you a little test. Incidentally, she devised it herself. Not much for poetry myself. Passing it is one of her conditions, though, and every one of the young men ahead of you failed it. That is, except for the chap with the big nose. But he had other disqualifications. We'll do it this way. I'll quote a line and then you'll quote the next line and tell me the title and the author. Sounds hard, eh?"

If he quotes Wordsworth, I'm doomed, thought Charlie.

" 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day . . .' "

Good. An easy one. "Shakespeare. Sonnet XVIII. The next lines are:

'Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date . . .' "

Charlie was prepared to complete the sonnet, but Mr. Lane grew visibly impatient and interrupted him. "Splendid, my boy, splendid. Most unusual to find a knowledge of poetry in a sturdy chap, like you. Built like an athlete. Played cricket at Marlborough, I'll wager."

Yes, he admitted. And Rugby and soccer, and he had wrestled and boxed and swum in water cold enough to frostnip a penguin.

"Let's try one more:

'The child is father to the man.' "

Charlie shuddered. It was Wordsworth, but fortunately not difficult Wordsworth.

"Don't know that one, eh?"

"Oh, yes. I missed it once on a test and looked it up later. The title is the first line. 'My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold.' And the next lines go:

'And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.' "

Mr. Lane sighed with the relief of one who had himself passed a difficult examination. "Young man, if you want the job, it's yours. As you know, the pay is lucrative. Oleandra is said to be one of the loveliest islands in the West Indies, and Mrs. Meynell, for all her eccentricities, is a damned fine-looking woman. But consider carefully. It's a long way from home."

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"I haven't any home any more. My mother's solicitor has put the London house up for sale."

"Let me come straight to the point. As I say, I haven't seen Mrs. Meynell since she lost her husband. She pays me a sizable fee. I follow her instructions to the letter. But sometimes I wonder if—well, grief might have softened her brain."

"How do you mean, Mr. Lane?"

"The things she has me order for her. Weapons of all kinds. Swords from India. Nooses used for strangling by that infamous sect, the Assassins. Cannons of every make. It's as if she were collecting for a man's trophy room."

Except for her choice of Wordsworth, Mrs. Meynell had impressed Charlie as an extraordinary woman. Now he came to her defense. "Don't you think it's her way of revering her husband's memory? Adding to his collection, I mean?"

"Her husband did not collect weapons. He collected wines and liquors—whenever he could resist guzzling them. Bibulous Bobby, we used to call him. But I've said more than I should. If you've made up your mind, you must go ahead with a stout heart and a strong back, as we used to say at Eton. Mrs. Meynell may be mad as a hatter, but she will be good company, you may be sure of that. For all I know, she wants you for herself instead of her daughter." He hastened to clarify. "To quote poetry, I mean. You can be David to her Saul, if you'll forgive my likening an English lady to a Jewish king. She includes a line or two in every letter she writes me. For some reason, the last one stuck in my mind. Couldn't make heads or tails of it:

'Childe Roland to the dark tower came.'"

"Browning."

"Mrs. Browning, eh? Now there was a great lady."

"Robert, I mean."

"Oh, the obscure one. The *Sordello* fellow."

And so Childe Roland had come to Oleandra.

III

CHARLIE'S first impression of Oleandra was that he had accomplished his purpose: That he had substituted the alien for the familiar, the exotically memorable for the wistfully remembered. That monumental leech called grief, which fed on memories, would not be starved by a change of landscape, but at least it would not be fed by a house in London or the downs of Marlborough.

Certainly, the burros, the Caribs, the circuitous climb up the side of the crater, over the rim, and down through frangipani and mountain immortelle, kapok and

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shower-of-gold, was totally alien to him. Outside the crater, the winds had screeched and whistled and beaten the sea grapes against the disheveled earth; inside the crater, the riot of birds and flowers, the intensity of colors, had seemed not remotely English.

But then there had been the quieting of the winds as they descended the inner slopes and a little pleasant lane of stone cottages with thatched roofs and, substituting admirably for hollyhocks and geraniums, neatly trimmed hedges of crimson bougainvillea. He felt a curious revulsion, even a sense of betrayal. What right had an English village to twinkle on the inner slopes of a crater in the West Indies? One of the cottages, it was true, was reached by a path which ran between two enormous cannons. Still, they were English cannons, rusty, innocuous, looking as if they had come from a museum in the suburbs of London. Why could they not have been Spanish or Moorish or Malay or anything strange and alien and, yes, sinister? (He was later to learn that the master of the cottage was not to be judged by his cannons.)

At the end of the village the path curved sharply into a small forest of oleanders, some of them growing to ten or more feet and spreading their tapered leaves into graceful green fingers which flaunted, like so many rings, an abundance of pink and white flowers. Another curve of the path and he saw the Red House, and he was inescapably back in England, looking at the house which Morris had built for his beloved bride, Jane Burden, in 1860. Here in painstaking imitation—and many a pain had been taken to transport the bricks from England—was the tranquil and restrained Gothic beloved by Morris; Gothic in its purity and simplicity rather than its grotesquerie. Here was no Castle of Otranto; here were no black turrets and waterspouts ending in gargoyles, but a warm expanse of red brick, a high-pitched red-tiled roof, and three gables, each with tall sash windows through which no Duke of Otranto ever seemed to have peered.

His disappointment was acute. He had crossed the Atlantic and half of the Caribbean to escape England, to renounce England, to forget England, and here was the very country of his grief resurrected in miniature and, what was worse, in its milder aspects. The tranquillities of the Red House seemed precisely calculated to recall his mother, whom he had always associated with green gardens and gracious houses. It was as if he were coming home but only in a dream which he knew to be a cruel deception. Where were the eccentricites with which Mrs. Meynell had startled staid Mr. Lane?

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In sight of their mistress' house, the Caribs dropped their gloom and petulance; they chattered merrily; they vied to unload Charlie's baggage; they began to address him, in their polyglot language, with a word which was unmistakably "master." At first he supposed that they wanted a gratuity and wondered if they would accept English pounds.

Then he saw the reason for their transformation. Mrs. Meynell was standing in the arch of the main door.

Like her countrywomen in England, she wore the hot, flaring, impractical, but magnificent skirt of the day. Under that voluminous bell, she could have hidden the hips of an elephant or a giraffe, but her bold and revealing blouse left little doubt as to the splendor of her forearms, her shoulders, and her breasts. Her gown was green satin. Below her elbows were cuffs of green brocade; and a moss-green bonnet followed the contours of her golden, backswept, downfalling hair, except where a pert white feather flared above her head.

At first she made no gesture to greet him. She stared at him with unconcealed surprise and, it seemed to Charlie, a concern which was strangely akin to that of Mr. Lane when the kindly old solicitor had cautioned him about accepting the position. She stepped forward slightly and extended her hand. He noticed that the movement seemed difficult for her. She moved with a kind of slow and graceful languor, and she held tightly to his hand for support. Perhaps the tropical climate had enervated her. Perhaps she had been ill with malaria or yellow fever.

A smile illuminated her face. In fact, she did not so much smile as radiate with her entire body, as if she had been suffused by the lights of a great candelabrum in a ballroom. Her skin was the pink of sweetheart roses. He looked in vain for the lines which should have marked the passage of sixteen years, including her widowhood and whatever illness had drained her of strength. But for all he could tell, she appeared to be a ripe and bountiful woman of thirty. Perhaps in this tropical climate—though because of the trade winds it was not really hot, even inside the crater—she preserved her beauty by economizing in her movements and thus her languor, so contrary to the bloom of her face and figure, was as deliberate as her delicately indelicate gown and her artfully artless coiffure.

"I stared at you," she smiled, "because of my good fortune and Mr. Lane's good judgment in choosing one who somehow manages to look like both an athlete and a poet at the same time. The athlete will please my daughter,

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and the poet will delight her mother. If it weren't for your blond hair and your considerable height, I could have taken you for John Keats."

Considerable height. How much more gracious than Mr. Lane's description of him as middling! And the comparison to Keats—! Charlie was not adept at exchanging fulsome compliments, but now his words spilled forth like coins from a cornucopia.

"And I took you for Guinevere. I'm sure she had hair like yours. The color of ripe wheat. And she was beautiful and *bountiful.*"

She laughed heartily. "I take that for a compliment, though 'bountiful' has been used as a synonym for 'fat.' "

"Oh, no," he protested. "I meant to say you're a stunner!"

And then, tongue-tied by his lapse into slang, he waited to be rescued by her tact.

She said quite simply, "Thank you, my dear. No one on Oleandra has ever paid me such a tribute. I've always identified a little with Guinevere. You must teach my daugher about the Arthurian cycle. She disdains Malory and abhors Tennyson. I'm afraid she prefers the local folklore, with all its barbarisms."

"Where is your daughter?" A charming fancy occurred to him. If a woman between forty-five and fifty could look thirty, perhaps a girl of fifteen could look nineteen and, even if she disliked Tennyson, possess her mother's grace and naturalness instead of the affectations and airs of the girls he had known in England.

"She's with us now, I suspect. Behind a tree, in a tree, in the house staring out a window. Who can say? Probably she wanted to look you over from a distance before she meets you. Her manners could use some polishing, and I hope she overhears me. Jill, Jill, come and meet Mr. Sorley!"

There was no answer. Silence seemed tangible in the cassia-sweet air. With a shock akin to fear, Charlie realized that in all the trees surrounding the Red House, he had seen and heard no birds. Approaching the village, yes. Even in the village, yellow-breasted sugar birds had played among the bougainvilleas and warbled their rapid and somewhat wheezing songs. But not here, not within the enchanted (bewitched?) circle of the Red House. He would have to modify his first impression of bland English charm. To Charlie a house without birds was a troubled house.

But there were still the Caribs. Even after unloading his belongings and Mrs. Meynell's supplies, they had not withdrawn into the bush where they seemed to belong. Two English servants, a stooped, sallow man, rather like a bent broomstick, and a small boy who

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seemed to be his son, muffled in a shapeless sack-like garment from which his bare feet protruded like the feelers of a snail, had emerged from the house, glared at the Indians, and wordlessly appropriated the belongings, while the Caribs had taken up silent stations among the trees. Their sullen faces glittered with curiosity and malice. Perhaps they wished to see the confrontation between the young Englishman and the girl he had come to teach.

Mrs. Meynell followed Charlie's gaze, and Charlie watched the look which passed between her and her presumed servants and reached some intuitive conclusions. She was their mistress, yes, but they disliked her even while they served her. For her own part, she needed them to fetch her supplies from the schooner, cultivate cacao and other island crops, and tend the cottages in the village; she tolerated and controlled them—to a point. But at any moment, depending on circumstances which even Charlie's intuition could not surmise, the control might falter and fail. The Red House grew steadily less tranquil and more intriguing.

Almost curtly, she dismissed the Caribs with a flick of her wrist, or tried to dismiss them. In fact, they did not respond with the least movement; they had not yet seen what they had waited to see. They kept to their places with a tenacity which bordered on insolence.

The clapping of hands was neither loud nor prolonged; once, twice, and the Caribs were gone, and in their place stood a single native. He was not one of the rowers and porters; he was a newcomer, and to call him a Carib like his countrymen was to do him an injustice. He was tall and bronzed and fiercely beautiful, and he somehow seemed, even on this tiny island, a king. He directed his smile to Charlie, and it was as if he had said, "Welcome to my kingdom, as guest—and subject."

Then, like his men, he faded among the cassias. "His name is Curk," Elizabeth said with a studied casualness. "He is my foreman. You will have to forgive his men for their bad manners. A stranger, especially one who has come to teach their beloved Jill, makes them curious and a little jealous. You see, she has spent a lot of time with them—far too much, in fact. I am often confined to my bed and she's thrown on her own devices. Without playmates, she goes to the Caribs. Now they feel they're losing her to an Englishman. They don't like us very much, except for Jill. Or anybody else, including each other, again with one exception—Curk, whom they adore. You might call them living anachronisms—a race that ought to be extinct but has

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somehow survived in spite of itself, and in a world it despises."

"You're not fair to them, Mama." It was Jill. She appeared to have dropped from a tree or come around a tree or even out of the earth. She made no apology. Unfortunately, her appearance was far less provocative than her arrival. Almost with relief Charlie realized that he was not in danger of falling in love with her. She was no competition for her mother. Though he knew her to be about fifteen, she looked at the moment even younger, a tomboy this side of puberty, dressed in cut-off sailor trousers and middy blouse, her hair like a nest constructed by an untidy bird.

"You're not fair at all," she continued. "You hold it against them that they won't live in your cottages and take baths and plant gardens. I keep telling you, they're happy in the mangrove swamp, and dirt to them isn't something to be washed off."

There were redeeming features to the girl. Her skin was a rich, deep brown—it was not an English complexion, but it was not unbecoming—and her green eyes possessed almost an Oriental slant which would have seemed mysterious and alluring had she dressed to accentuate them and combed her tawny hair. She was, in brief, a probably pretty girl who had managed to disguise her prettiness and almost her sex.

When Mrs. Meynell failed to pursue the argument about the Caribs, Jill turned to Charlie. "I dislike French. I'll study it only because of the boats that come in from Martinque—I like to talk to the sailors—but you'll have to prod me with the grammar. I'm very good at biology, though. I can teach *you* some things about life in the sea. And how to dress on Oleandra. I keep telling mother not to wear those absurd skirts. But she *will* look like the ladies in England. And you—what are those ridiculous tweeds and boots you're wearing? And the bowler hat with the feather about to take flight?"

"They're my bicycling outfit," said Charlie, crestfallen. He had really not known how a young man should dress on Oleandra and he had chosen his jauntiest outfit. But Jill had a point; a tweed coat, braided trousers, and Hessian boots, however jaunty in England, were merely hot in the tropics. "What should I wear?"

"What I do," she said. "You can pick up some sailor togs from the schooner next month."

"We don't want two sailors in the house," Mrs. Meynell said tartly. "Some of my husband's old linens can be altered to fit Mr. Sorley, though he looks very nice."

"If you like ruddy English schoolboys who learn how to win battles on the playing fields of Eton."

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Charlie forced a smile. "In my case, Marlborough, and my first battle is not yet won." He was trying to like her in spite of her absolute refusal to be gracious, but he found himself withholding judgment; he must learn what frustrations explained her incivilities. "I'm sure you can teach me a great deal about the Caribbean. Just an hour ago I mistook a dolphin for a shark."

Her eyes brightened. "You're sure it *wasn't* a shark? There are all kinds in the waters around the island. Real beauties. Hammerheads, especially, but also blue sharks and tigers. Usually the dolphins keep their distance."

"No, it was a dolphin all right. We became friends while the Caribs rowed me ashore."

"He won't last long in these waters," she predicted happily. "Not with all those sharks."

"Oh, he was a lovable dolphin. You wouldn't want anything to happen to him." Not only was he finding it hard, as yet, to like her, he was finding it hard not to dislike her.

She grimaced. "They're such ugly creatures. And so vicious. Have you ever seen a shark battered to death by dolphins? They ram him from all sides until he's a bloody pulp."

"My sympathies would be with the dolphins. After all, the sharks kill their calves."

"That's because you're sentimental. A dolphin knows how to play up to a man. To get his attention with tricks. Leaping and gamboling and catching fish in midair and all that. You probably believe those silly stories about dolphins rescuing sailors. But at heart they're the most vicious creature in the sea."

"I don't think so at all," he snapped, wishing for the big hickory cane which had belonged to the headmaster at Marlborough. If she dressed like a boy and talked like a bully, a good caning was exactly what she deserved. "The one I saw today—"

"Come into the house now. Mother's not used to being on her feet so long."

He looked at Mrs. Meynell. The color had left her face, but not, it seemed to him, from weariness. She was looking at her daughter with a kind of disgust and despair.

"Jill has a curious sense of—affection," she said in a dead voice. "I hope you can change her tastes."

"Or I'll change his," Jill laughed. "What'll I call you? Charles or Charlie?"

It was the one time in his life when he stood on his dignity. No one who disliked dolphins could use his given name.

"You may call me 'Mr. Sorley.'"

They walked into the house.

And no birds sang.

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IV

I EMERGED from a tortuous and torturesome passage into a brilliance of sunlight and green water. I was used to blue lagoons which reflected the sky and black lagoons so deep that they seemed to have swallowed the sky. But green—! It had borrowed the hue of young palm fronds, and it spoke of the land and not the sea; it spoke to me.

On one end, a mangrove swamp enticed with many canals; on the other, a beach of powder-fine black sand expressly created for swimmers like Charlie to rest and sunbathe after they had frolicked in the water with a dolphin. I had heard of such beaches, black instead of pink or white, but soft to the toe or the eye, from dolphins who had visited Tahiti.

The other sides of the lagoon were less inviting. I leaped repeatedly until I had chiseled a clear sculpture of them in my brain. Sheer walls, like titan faces bewiskered with foliage, reared toward the sky. One such face was broken by a ledge, perhaps a hundred feet above the water. I shuddered as if I had suddenly spilled from the Gulf Stream into the cold Atlantic, for I knew its name: The Ledge Which Looms Like a Shark. Its stone configurations, even to the gaping jaws, not only deserved the name but (according to my informant, the Old Bull) served the Caribs in their rituals honoring the shark-headed Tark, their national deity.

There was no trace of a shark in the lagoon, however. I peered, I exercised my nostrils, I opened my mouth and allowed the water to flow across my sensitive taste buds. All in all, and in spite of the ominous-looking ledge, I loved what I had found. I could not return to the land and reverse the disastrous course of my ancestors, but I could at least surround myself with land and reduce the encompassment of the sea. What was more, in my leaps I had seen the little English cottages climbing the crater wall, and above them, flaunting its chimneys and flashing its red bricks in the afternoon sun, the house of Mrs. Meynell and my new friend, Charlie; the Red House inspired by William Morris.

You understand that at this time I did not know about contemporary human poets and designers like Morris. We dolphins only know what we hear and see and what our elders have known and seen. I knew about Shakespeare and his play *The Tempest.* I knew about Milton's *Paradise Lost,* which seemed to me a parable of the dolphins and their exile from the land. Later I overheard Charlie giving Jill some of her lessons, and of course he often talked to me, even though it was a long time until he learned that I

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could understand him. Since dolphins are born historians, we pick up facts as naturally and quickly as we capture slow-swimming prawns in our open jaws. It is part of our not being able to write and having to remember things.

I swam and leapt until I was exhausted, memorizing the contours of this, my new home, remembering distances, gauging relationships between the lagoon and the land. I found the water remarkably fresh, considering its single outlet to the sea, and abundant with pompano, lobsters, crabs, angelfish, and small octopi, with an occasional man-of-war which I scrupulously avoided. Yesterday, I would have fed as I wandered, and wandered with listless flippers and unobservant eyes. Today, I was too excited to feed. Once I had ascertained the abundance of food, I proceeded to the mangrove swamp and discovered a maze of canals, and tiny islets where dirt had collected around the roots of the thick-grown plants, and occasional land bridges evidently made by men. There was one path which led straight from the edge of the lagoon, where three dugout canoes had been upended and covered with palm fronds, through the swamp, and up the slope toward the Red House. Bordering this path (or should I say littering?), were the palm-thatched huts of the Caribs, whom Mrs. Meynell had been unable to entice into her cleanly cottages. Naked babies waded in the canals or played among a refuse of coconut shells and banana peels, and slatternly women snoozed on straw pallets which they had arranged in the shade as far as possible from their children. Had I been a shark, I could have taken my pick of the wading babies, though in spite of their plumpness they were much too dirty—squalid is the word—to be appetizing.

Throughout my explorations, I lost no chance of leaping from the water to observe the Red House, with the hope that Charlie would appear in the great arch of the door and spy me in the lagoon. But it was not until the second day that he finally emerged from the house. He had changed his manner of dress. In place of the bicycling outfit he had worn on his arrival, he now wore sky-blue, bell-bottom trousers, with an open shirt and a red scarf. He looked down at the lagoon, and as I spun madly in midair I saw that I had caught his eye. He moved to descend the cliff. But almost at once a slender figure—boy or girl, I could not say—stepped from the house, beckoned, commandingly, almost insolently, it seemed to me, and Charlie stopped in his tracks. The figure was indeterminate—the shape was slim and girlish, though without any perceptible bosom, but the clothes were male:

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the pants of a sailor cut off below the knees, a kind of middy blouse, and neither shoes nor sandals. Sailor, did I say? I might have said pirate. Immediately I disliked it. Anything gotten up so strangely meant no good to Charlie or me; besides, it was keeping him from his visit to me. But my distaste ran deeper than jealousy. It was touched with fear. My third eye saw more than it liked.

It took Charlie by the arm and attempted to lead him into the house. He pointed vehemently to the lagoon, to me, spinning through my endless somersaults. I was too distant to follow their conversation. The figure shrugged as if to say, "You're not going to climb the crater to see a dolphin, are you?" He nodded.

"Yes," he seemed to say, "that's exactly what I'm going to do." The figure spun away from him and stalked into the house. Of course it was Jill, the girl I have already described to you in an earlier episode. He followed her into the house. Really, he had no choice.

All day I circled the lagoon, exhausting myself by leaping to view the house, skirting the shore in case Charlie eluded his charge and came exploring. Finally, the next afternoon, I was rewarded for my vigilance. Perhaps he had left her occupied with lessons—memorizing kings or lines of poetry. At any rate he left the house with the confident stride of one who knows his destination. Joyfully he clambered down the side of the crater, taking an occasional tumble over a banyan root, rising to resume his descent without even bothering to brush off his clothes.

Breathlessly I watched his progress (I can hold my breath for a good twenty minutes), expecting all the way that Jill would change her mind about the lesson and follow him or send a Carib after him. But no, he made his way to the bottom of the cliff and followed the dry, raised path among the mangrove trees. I lost sight of him for a time and hoped that those dirty little Carib children would not gawk at him or pelt him with Indian cigars, the fruit of the mangrove. It was not long before, apparently unpelted, he reached the end of the path and the edge of the water and gave a huge, buoyant cry. Suddenly I felt a surprising shyness and made myself as unobtrusive as possible under the water. Have you ever anticipated a meeting with great enthusiasm and then, once it approaches, feared that it will be a disappointment—that you may appear ridiculous rather than enthusiastic?

He blithely stripped off his clothes and dove into the lagoon. I must confess to a certain surprise. I was not accustomed to seeing young English gentlemen remove their clothes. Caribs, yes. Sailors

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from any country, yes. But not English boys like Charlie. I could fancy the Carib slatterns crouching behind the mangroves to ogle and ridicule his, to their eyes, pallid skin. But no bushes crackled and the slatterns were doubtless asleep along with their urchins. But another reservation occurred to me. If Charlie wished to strip, that was his privilege, but how did I know that, thus vulnerable, he was safe in these unfamiliar waters? He was a northerner who knew nothing of the tropics. I had seen no sharks, but one might yet discover the entrance from the sea; and a man-of-war, of which I had seen a number, would sting him into unconsciousness. Well, I would just have to scout for him, guide him, protect him. First, though, we must get reacquainted. I was sadly aware that all dolphins of the same size, unless they happen to be albinos, look the same to most humans. What is more, they are usually miscalled porpoises (who are distant cousins, without our "bottle-noses"). In the first place, he probably would not recognize me from yesterday in this totally different location. In the second place, even if he did, it was one thing to pat a dolphin's head when you are on the land, another to meet him nose to bottle-nose in his own element.

Stroking with grace and power, like one who had traversed many a Thames or Severn, he sped away from the shore. With alarm I saw that he meant to swim the entire half mile to the beach. Those English schoolboys! There is nothing they will not do to test their skill. Not that half a mile is any great distance, but it might prove dangerous in a lagoon which was totally unknown to him. Tangling with a man-of-war can be worse than painful, it can be fatal for a swimmer far from shore. I eased around him in a large circle so that I would not crowd and frighten him. He recognized me at once and began to tread water. What is more, he smiled. Such prompt recognition was flattering to say the least. Since I possessed no distinguishing physical characteristics, except for my slight inclination to plumpness, it must have been sheer mental rapport. Waving happily, he swam toward me and I advanced to meet him.

There was an inevitable awkwardness when we met: young man and dolphin; land and sea. If he had been a dolphin like me, I would have tumbled about with him in a merry scramble, nudging, tickling, flipping. If I had been a young man like him, he would have shaken my hand. As it was, we were both at a loss as to how to communicate a greeting. It was Charlie who found a way. He simply reached out and, treading water, placed his hand on my head in a gesture of uncondescending salutation.

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In response, I squeaked, "Rest now. Then we'll swim and get acquainted," though I knew that my words would seem to Charlie nothing more than noises emitted through my airhole. At least I hoped that they would put him at ease, that he could grasp my good intentions from my intonations. Humans are brighter than dolphins in many respects. They can build houses with their hands and paint pictures of themselves and us and the sea and write books instead of having to compose orally and distort with every telling. But no man since Arion, the Greek poet, has ever been able to understand us. Needless to say, however, I could understand practically everything Charlie said to me, since dolphins have been overhearing and understanding swimmers and divers and sailors and beachcombers for several thousand years. I myself can understand eleven human languages and also readily converse with sperm whales and sea turtles.

When he spoke, it was for the same reason that I had spoken to him.

"You can't understand me," he said, "but I know that dolphins have ears—much prettier than mine, since they don't stick out"—leave it to tactful Charlie to notice my ears instead of my snout—"and I feel like talking to you because—well, because I want to talk to someone who's sympathetic."

Sympathetic. That was his exact word to me. To selfish Gloomer, who had thought about nothing and nobody but himself since his mother had died. Well, Charlie had changed all that just by thinking the best of me.

"It's funny. I can't tell the people in the house. Mrs. Meynell rests most of the time and Jill talks most of the time about sharks and battles. I can talk to you, though, and it doesn't matter if you don't know what I'm saying. If you did, you'd understand, and that's what matters."

There were big tears in his eyes. This stocky, manly boy was about to cry. He ducked to erase the tears and emerged with a smile.

"What a windbag I am! Let's have a swim." He let go of me and resumed his passage across the lagoon. Since I had appointed myself his protector, it seemed the propitious moment to teach him how to ride me. Metaphorically speaking, it was the best way to keep him under my flipper. In the old Greek sculptures, the boy is shown clutching the dolphin's back, legs wrapped around the body. Such a conception represents the error of sculptors who had never ridden dolphins nor seen them ridden. Certainly it was not the way Arion rode the dolphin or dolphins who rescued him from the pirates. It is not by tail and flippers alone that we manage

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to swim with the speed of a shark and the zest of a seal. We have to be free to wriggle our entire bodies.

My problem was twofold: first I had to convey to Charlie that he ought to ride me; second, how to ride me. I caught his foot in my beak and interrupted his swim. He turned and surveyed me over his shoulder with some astonishment. Another joke? The shark masquerade repeated? An invitation to horseplay (forgive my zoologically misleading word)? He was not angry but he was just this side of impatience. I released the foot and immediately darted under him and rose under his legs. Now he understood that I was offering him a ride. My first problem was solved. But he clutched me so tightly that he almost sank both of us. I could neither breathe nor advance. I shook clear of him, dipped, and rose under him so gently that I did not so much lift as ease him out of the water. This time he held me much less tightly, but still his legs hampered my movements.

Dolphins pride themselves on their smooth, sensitive skin—never a barnacle on *us*—and Charlie's arms and legs, though muscular, were neither abrasive nor bruising. In fact, it was as if he were giving me a big friendly embrace; he seemed a part of the land warming me momentarily from the wetness and sliminess of the sea I disliked. But remember, I am still a youth, and I lacked the skill to swim with my body enwrapped, however lightly, by two strapping legs. Once more I dislodged him, faced him directly, and wriggled my dorsal fin in a manner to suggest the part of me which I meant for him to grasp. He delivered an "ah" of comprehension, grasped the fin with amazingly sensitive fingers for such a sturdy hand, and off I sped, his body gliding above me. To an observer on the shore it must have looked as if he were seated directly on my back; in truth, I was drawing him through the water.

The beach loomed up at us like the side view of a long black whale, and Charlie, quite breathless from excitement, and I, equally breathless because of my burden, parted company in shallow water. He patted my head and clambered onto the fine, squishing sand. By this time his nakedness seemed to me entirely natural. After all, I never wear clothes, and why should men—even English gentlemen—wear them in a warm lagoon?

Then I heard a laugh. The indeterminate person from the Red House—I saw now that she was a young girl of fifteen or so; it is hard to be exact about the age of young human females, since they all look much the same to me except for their bosoms (or lack

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thereof)—was standing on the beach and shaking with laughter. She was disfigured as usual (I refuse to say dressed) in fisherman's trousers cut off at the knee, with an old shirt which a Carib would have been ashamed to wear and which failed to conceal the fact that if she had any breasts, they resembled lemons instead of coconuts. A lady would not have appeared in such garb. Furthermore, a lady would have absented herself when faced by a naked gentleman. Was she trying to pass for a pirate lad?

Charlie turned and, without the least discomposure, retraced his steps into the water. When he was covered to his waist, he turned to face her. He seemed to forget that the water was transparent.

"I thought you were Odysseus washed ashore by the storm," she taunted.

"If you're Nausicaä, I suggest you disappear with your maidens to study your French. You were supposed to read two lessons in the grammar."

"You've already given me an anatomy lesson. I've always wondered if Englishmen were like Caribs. Besides, you're not old enough to be Odysseus, and I'm not decorous enough to be a princess. If you insist on the French, you'll have to give me some help with the irregular verbs. From what I've heard of French novels, I think you're dressed exactly right."

He forced himself to sound very stern and tutorial. "Young ladies do not read French novels. Not the kind in the yellow covers, I mean. The kind *you* seem to mean."

Then, with infinite dignity (though I could see that he was smothering a chuckle) he turned his back on her, grasped my dorsal fin, and we began to recross the lagoon.

"Wait, Mr. Sorley," she called after him, "I'll fetch you some clothes."

He pretended not to hear her.

"Mr. Sorley, I *command* you to wait."

Charlie always did prefer older women.

V

His room was austerely but tastefully furnished. What had William Morris said? Let objects be few, functional and beautiful. There was a dressing table of plain oak and a marble-topped washstand. A massive settle, a pillowless bench with sides and back as tall as a standing man and embellished with medieval maidens playing dulcimers, dominated the room, pleased the eye, and functioned no doubt for those with generously padded backbones; but Charlie was a little sore from his swim in the lagoon and deplored

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the lack of cushions. He climbed into his nightdress and then into his bed, a large canopied affair, its curtains intertwined with lilies and blades of grass. Should he draw the curtains? No. Though the night was cool, such a gesture seemed a confession of cowardice, a shutting out of whatever vaguely but tangibly frightened him about the island on this, his second night, a shutting in of his loneliness and grief.

Barefooted, shuffling, his little form inundated by his large, hooded robe, Telesphorus entered the room with a pair of candles, one to light his way, one to leave with Charlie.

"Mistress say you will need two candle to read by." He was an English boy, but reared in the islands with colored playmates, and his voice was soft, his grammar relaxed, and he tended to slur and run together his words like the Negroes Charlie had seen on Martinique. It was a speech which suited a leisurely life in the tropics, where to sleep through the afternoon was considered a necessity and no one ran when he could walk unless he was being pursued by a fer-delance.

Charlie thought guiltily that he ought to be reading the third chapter in that abominable grammar he was trying to teach Jill.

"Thank you, Telesphorus. Tell your mistress I'm grateful for her thoughtfulness."

Telesphorus looked carefully around the room, at Charlie, at the bed, at the books scattered on the settle, and seemed to feel that he could depart and carry a good report to the mistress about the studiousness of the new tutor.

"Will tell mistress. Master too."

"The master, you say?" Mr. Meynell had been dead some fifteen years. "Do you mean your father?"

"No."

"Are there other servants who give you orders?" He had been puzzled at the seeming lack of them in so large and fine a house.

"Five of them once. All go back to England. Now Caribs come to clean when master allow."

"But who is the master you keep mentioning?" His exasperation was hard to contain.

"Lives in village. Back of cannons." And then he was gone, like a candle snuffed by a sudden wind . . .

"Mr. Sorley."

He woke with a jolt. Yes, he had actually fallen asleep after Telesphorus' departure. He might, for a change, have slept all night had he not been awakened by Jill. He could not be vexed with her, however, when he saw the fragile face lit by a single taper, the tanned skin beneath hair as fine and silvery as a spider's web. Jill in the evening, it seemed, was not the strident tomboy of the afternoon.

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"Mr. Sorley, my mother wishes to see you."

"Now?" The hour was late, if he could judge by his half-burned candle.

"At once. She is ill, you see. She has taken a spell."

"But Telesphorus and his father—" It was not drowsiness which kept him from wanting to visit Mrs. Meynell in her bed, nor even propriety; it was something which he dared not try to define.

She made a gesture of contempt. "They have no understanding."

"I'll follow you," he said. "First, I must—" and here he stammered, "—I must put on my trousers."

She laughed and tugged on his arm. "I'm an island girl. I don't know your English niceties. Come as you are. All I can see are your feet, and I saw much more this afternoon. Here are some slippers I've brought. So now you're as muffled as a corpse laid out for burial." Again, the disquieting Jill, brazen of gesture, macabre of speech.

He followed her down the hall; she was careful to keep ahead of him, not out of deference to his modesty, he supposed, but in her haste to reach her mother. His slippers slapped the bare wooden floor with little hollow taps.

He wondered why he had been embarrassed by his nightdress in front of this strange, wild girl, who had not in the least embarrassed him that afternoon on the beach. In England, it was true, in a country house, if there was only one bathroom to a suite of bedrooms and guests met in the halls by accident at night, they politely averted their eyes and did not speak. But he was not in England and his hostess of the moment, in spite of her English parenthood, had proclaimed herself a child of the islands. Perhaps it was the vulnerability which had briefly marked her when she first awoke him. Then, it was as if she, and not he, had been the one surprised in an unguarded and revealing gentleness.

Mrs. Meynell's canopied bed, with its damask curtains flowered with the golden sunflowers so beloved by the Pre-Raphaelites, reminded him of the great red tent of a queen—Guinevere? Iseult?—who had come to watch her lover joust in a tournament. His fancies were not in the least diminished by the practical observation that the feet of the bed were set in little pails of water to prevent the encroachment of ants or spiders.

The scent of laudanum was strong in the air, at once acrid and sickeningly sweet. The powerful, sleep-inducing drug was freely dispensed in most apothecary shops. But such quantities as he smelled in the room indicated addiction. He thought of Elizabeth Barrett languishing in her sickbed with

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drugs and dreams; waiting for the robust poet who would free her from the twin tyrannies of a harsh father and a mysterious malady.

Jill paused in the door, her face a curious complexity for one so young. Compassion for her mother's apparent pain. Surprise and envy at the summoning of a stranger in the middle of the night when she, the daughter, stood ready to comfort her mother.

Through the open curtains of her bed, Mrs. Meynell spoke drowsily but with quiet authority.

"Thank you, Jill. You may go now. Your robe is thin. The trade winds are chilly at night."

"Shall I come back to fetch Mr. Sorley?"

"He can find his own way back."

Mrs. Meynell motioned him beside her on the bed. She smiled at his hesitation.

"In the islands we forget the amenities. I am an invalid, you see. Do you think I feel compromised if a young gentleman, young enough to be my son, sits beside me on my sickbed? Should he feel compromising? Think of me as Elizabeth Barrett before her marriage to Robert. You've come to administer a medicine or prescribe a trip to Italy for my health, or simply to keep me company through another sleepless night."

His hesitation was momentary. He was not a prude but a poet, and Mrs. Meynell's mention of the Brownings seemed to him to border on the clairvoyant and to augur the development of a devoted friendship. Furthermore, she was disarmingly young and beautiful in the light of the candelabrum—a rosette of mischievous angels—which swung from the ceiling. By daylight she had looked a ripe thirty; by candlelight, an intoxicating twenty-five.

She took his hand and held it against her forehead. She was damp and cold.

"You're having a chill," he cried.

"Loneliness is chilling, my dear. But you must know that already, better than I." Her beauty was flawless even at closest range.

"Yes. Yes, I know."

"Loneliness is like a sea anemone writhing in your entrails. Nobody knows it's there but you. But it grows and wounds and finally devours you."

The slight coarseness of her speech, the word "entrails," unthinkable in England except among women of the lower classes, did not trouble him in the least; rather, he was fascinated by her total disregard for the dictates of the society into which they had both been born and which, apparently, they had both withstood.

"You lost your husband some years ago, didn't you?"

"Lost him? Yes, but it was what I found which—" She broke off suddenly and squeezed his hand

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with desperate tenderness. Her amber eyes reminded him of honeycombs. Why did he also think, momentarily and guiltily, of bees and stingers, of pride and the power to wound?

"May I bring you some medicine?" he asked with real concern.

"I have a cabinet of medicines. I have two servants and a daughter to administer them. I have already taken my nightly dose of laudanum. But your arrival—first on the island, then in my room—has excited me beyond sleep. Sit here and talk to me. Your voice is very soothing, you know. Deep and manly, but gentle and young—so young. Are you truly gentle, Mr. Sorley?"

"Sometimes impatient, I'm afraid."

"When? With whom? With me for fetching you out of a warm bed in the middle of the night?"

"Never with you," he said, almost with vehemence. "How could I be angry with you? With myself, I meant. Most of all with circumstances."

"But circumstances—those beyond our control—are indeed maddening. Impatience is a very tiny and quite forgivable sin in such cases. Now we shall forget our sins and talk of happy things. Our tropical nights seem longer than those in England, don't they? Sometimes I feel quite maddened by tree frogs or the wind in the casuarina trees. Talk to me, Mr. Sorley, and we shall pass the night together."

"You surely don't want to hear the adventures of a schoolboy. You know, till now I've never been out of school. First Marlborough, then a year at Cambridge."

She pressed his hand with maternal ardor. "Poor little schoolboy thrust out into the sinful world." Was there a touch of irony in her words? "I should never have sent for you. I had no way of knowing how innocent you were. I had expected a hard, brawling fellow—educated, yes, after all, he had to teach my daughter—but dogged by gambling debts and enemies, and likely as not dispossessed by his father for excessive wenching."

"Whatever you expected, I'm glad I came. I found more than I had expected."

"Yes, I'm afraid you did," she sighed. "Much, much more. Now talk to me about England. The Lake Country. The downs around Marlborough. The incredible greenness of the trees along the Thames. I know about your mother and your brother, and I grieve for you. But now I want countrysides—oaks and not palms, heather and not seagrapes. Winters and hearthfires and snow on the roof. Changing seasons—how precious they are. There are no seasons here. Except that one still grows old, and it's more of a shock because the leaves don't redden and fall—there isn't any cycle

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in nature to reflect the change. There are only mirrors. But here I am growing morbid again. And what did you love the most in England?"

"Walking the downs near Marlborough in the autumn. Digging among the leaves for mounds where the fairies live—the Irish call them Sidhe."

"Do you believe in the Sidhe?"

"Yes." His ancestors were Celts and his answer was unequivocal. He was not being figurative or fanciful. He was telling her the literal truth. She was not a woman to whom one lied, though she might be a woman, he reflected, who told one lies.

"They're still there—in their mounds?"

"I don't think so. I think they've gone away. Gone somewhere else where people still believe in them."

"No, my dear," she said with finality. "Every land has its Sidhe, its Dark Ones. They're much too strong, proud, clever to flee. You see, they know how to hide when people cease to honor them. When the church speaks out against them. The Little People, they're called. But of course they aren't little at all. They're just hard to recognize through their disguises. Thus they can work their evil so secretly that people think them small, if people think about them at all. But when they choose to be seen, they are—monstrous. Whatever their names, every land has them."

"You've seen them?"

The change in her was instantaneous. Like Jill, she sometimes seemed to be several persons. She laughed a quick bitter laugh. "It's the late hour. The fancies of childhood are coming back to me. No, I haven't seen them. Your mounds near Marlborough are not their dwellings at all, but tombs for the old warriors. The Sidhe never existed except in our nightmares. And here on Oleandra we can leave them to the superstitious Caribs . . ."

He wanted to argue for the existence of Sidhe, fairies, gnomes, Tritons, Centaurs. He wanted to argue that they were not so much evil as unmoral; that they loved and warred without violating any moral codes because they were not concerned with morality. But arguments would only disturb her. She had dismissed such beings from the conversation and, as it were, from the earth.

"And when you walk on the downs, what do you think about? London? Girls? Latin declensions for the next examination?" Though the bed was large, she was cosily close to him. He was sure that on first alighting he had allowed a decorous distance between them.

"I make up poetry," he said without embarrassment. At Marlborough they had called him The

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Poet out of admiration, not derision, because like William Morris and John Keats he had been as quick with his fists as with a couplet or a quatrain. He had once throttled a fellow for snickering at one of his sonnets.

"Love poetry? Nature poetry?"

"No," he corrected her. "I've never been in love so I don't try to write about it yet. And everybody writes about nature. Wordsworth quite turned me against daffodils. I write about the Celts and the Romans and the Saxons and the Normans. Bardic poetry. Battle poetry. Epic poetry, you might say, only I haven't finished a whole epic yet. I've only done two thousand lines of one."

"Your choice of subjects is highly commendable—Jill will be fascinated—but I don't feel like trumpets and clarions tonight. Tomorrow you shall recite your fragmentary epic to me. Tonight—tonight I should like something sweet, plaintive, melancholy. The nightingale not the war hawk."

"I'm not a nightingale myself, but what if I quoted some lines by Tennyson I learned at Marlborough? I thought them silly at the time, but they seem to have grown on me."

"I suspect you've grown on them. Go ahead."

He quoted with the fervor of his own grief:

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,

Tears from the depth of some divine despair

Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,

In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,

And thinking of the days that are no more."

"Our beloved laureate. Now he's our greatest poet, but the days that are no more are much more precious to him than the laureateship or audiences with the queen. The days at Cambridge. The days with his friend Hallam. His tears weren't idle at all, were they?"

She took him in her arms as naturally as a mother enfolds her child. She was beautiful like his own mother, with the sweet rounded softness of a Madonna, and then with delectable guilt he realized that she was not so much a Madonna as a Titian Venus, soft and rounded, yes, but for cradling Mars and not the Christ child. She appeared to him less maternal by the second.

Though inexperienced, he had read the poems of Algernon Swinburne and a large number of French novels, and with gentle reluctance he disengaged himself from her embrace.

She laughed. "My little virgin. You've never known a woman, have you?"

Why had she twice called him little? Why did she not see that he was medium in height, even if not

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tall, and stocky of build, rather like the William Morris she so much admired? A good wrestler, a good climber. No softness anywhere. And why had she called him "virgin" with seeming disdain? Victorian boys of nineteen were nominally expected to be virgins, but some of his friends had been taken to places by their fathers, given a knowing nudge in the ribs, and left in the custody of a plump, painted woman.

"Dear Mr. Sorley," she smiled. "You didn't know you had been engaged—lured all the way from England—by a fallen woman, did you? You didn't realize the full extent of your duties."

"My duties," he said manfully, "are to tutor Jill in French, biology, poetry, and related subjects."

"And nothing left for her mother? No wisdom to impart? No biology? No related subjects? Nothing to *learn* from her mother? No wisdom to *be* imparted?"

"You've already taught me something," he said. "If you're a fallen woman, I think I like them better than the other kind. Certainly they're prettier and better educated, and they make excellent conversation. With girls my age, I just sit around and talk about summering at Bath or the next season in London, and all I can do with them is waltz or walk in a garden. I kissed a girl once behind a grape arbor, and she was obviously enjoying herself until her sister found us, and then she slapped me and ordered me never to call on her again. Another time, I told a girl she had a pretty ankle and she stomped on my foot. It seems I wasn't supposed to have seen her ankle. Or maybe I was supposed to see it but not say anything. I don't know what you think you fell from, but I would call you a *climbed* woman."

She looked at him with pleasure and also with a question. His speech had clearly pleased and flattered her. But where did she stand with him? Was he merely bantering with her, or was he ready to yield to her blandishments?

He looked not at her but into his heart, pleased because he had managed to save her pride, drawn to her by her learning, loveliness, and sadness, wondering if at last he had begun, just begun, to fall in love with her. It was the wondering—the necessity to wonder at such a time—which restrained him. She desired him; he desired her; but perhaps he would overwhelmingly come to love her, and he must save the gift of his body for the moment of certainty. For it was, after all, though to him unremarkable, a gift. Having known the highest in family love, he did not intend to accept less than the highest in the love of a man for a woman.

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He took her hand and kissed it with a warm, firm pressure—courteously, yet not without passion. That was his answer. It was not yet time. He saw that she understood, that she was disappointed but not wounded; he was postponing her, not rejecting her.

"Very well," she said with a little gesture of futility. She had a way of making a kind of butterfly shape in the air with her hands. "Go if you must. But I shan't sleep if you leave me."

"Neither shall I," he confessed.

She called after him as he reached the door:

"Remember me when I am gone away,

Gone far away into the silent land . . ."

He turned in the door and continued the poem:

"When you can no more hold me by the hand,

Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay . . ."

"Christina Rossetti," she said softly. "She loved two men. But chastely. That kind of love is possible too, my dear. Stay with me a little, Charlie." The change to his given name was natural and touching. To his playmates and schoolmasters he had been Sorley; to his mother and brother, Charlie. "As my friend and nothing more. Will you do that for me, my dear?"

When he hesitated, she smiled mischievously. "Could one of your girl friends have quoted Christina Rossetti to you? The one you kissed behind the grape arbor?"

"All she could quote was the first stanza of 'I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud.' I've always disliked it. What's lonely about a cloud? If you had quoted Wordsworth, I would have kept on going."

He came into her arms as gratefully as a bear to its winter cave. She was redolent not of laudanum but of frangipani, exquisite and penetrating. He did not change his original resolve; he was content or at least resigned merely to lie with her in his arms, loving but not her lover, in a sweet and unassuageable yearning. She was Helen and Annabelle Lee and Ligeia and all those other sad, shadowy women of Edgar Allan Poe. She was his lady of frangipanis. . . .

He seemed to walk into sleep, and the path was soft with leaves and petals. A little boy and his mother were exploring a great garden.

"Look, Mother. The air is held up with birds!"

"It's the air that holds the birds up," she had laughed.

"Never mind. There's every color of a peacock's tail. Like the one in the London Zoo. Blue and red and—what's that color, Mother?"

"Indigo."

"I-n-d-i-g-o." He spoke each letter distinctly, relishing it, then

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putting them together into a new word which he would never forget. "Indigo. I like it best of all. It seems to have fallen out of a sunset."

When he awoke, the windows were brimming with light like three tall sun gods come to waken him.

But Elizabeth, unlike the lady in Shakespeare's sonnet, outshone the sun. Even in the dishevelment of her awakening, she stirred him with her beauty.

"My lovely virgin boy," she said. "Swaddled in your nightdress like an overgrown savior."

"Considerably overgrown," he said, "and not much good at saving."

She looked at him strangely. "Perhaps not souls. Nobody can save one's soul except oneself. But you saved the night for me." Then she grew playful. "Your hair is even more yellow than mine. It's the color of sugar birds. And as for the rest of you—even through all that cloth I can see those firm arms and legs. Do you know what, Charlie? Jill swims in the lagoon with nothing on!"

He had to admit to a momentary shock. Victorian girls who went swimming usually garbed themselves as if for purdah, segregated themselves from men, and shut themselves from the shore with bathing machines.

"One day you will swim in the lagoon like Jill and think you're all alone, but I will slip up behind a banyan tree and blend right in with the roots and spy on you."

"You may be disappointed," he began. "I'm not as tall as I ought to be. Just middling. That's the best you can say. And I have a mole on my back shoulder, and—"

She interrupted him with a laugh. "You don't even recognize the banter of a fallen woman. Here you chatter away as if I were a respectable matron. I had rather hoped to shock you into shocking me."

He yawned and stretched like a sleepy bear. "I'm too happy to be shocked."

Morning glories lifted purple—no, indigo—chalices around the window, but there was something wrong about them. An absence . . . of what?

"Why don't the birds come to your window?" he asked. "Even at Marlborough we had sparrows in the morning."

"They used to come, when Jill was a little girl. But she never liked them. She said they were cruel and spiteful and we only thought them pretty because of their feathers, which were like a cloak to hide their ugly hearts. She began to throw rocks at them. One day she took some oleander juice—you know, it's quite deadly—and sprinkled it over the morning glories. The birds that came that morning were all poi-

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soned. None of them come any more, not even the little sugar birds which are everywhere else on the island."

"What a horrible thing for Jill to do!"

"It was Curk who thought of the poison."

"Curk?"

"My manager. You saw him the afternoon you arrived."

"Yes, I saw him. He lives in the house with the cannons, doesn't he?"

"Yes. He visits with Jill sometimes. Teaches her things."

"I think he's a bad teacher."

"But of course he is. That's why I sent for you."

"Then I'm going to try to keep her away from him."

"That may be difficult. Do you know what his people call him?"

"No."

"The Man Who Swims With the Sharks."

VI

JILL was staring down the crater as if she would like to be visiting with the Caribs instead of studying in Rouaulls's French *Grammar*. But Charlie had already made far too many concessions to her. They would study not in the library, she had insisted, amidst a resplendent collection of world classics bound in leather, but under the cassia trees. They would sit on a particularly knobby area of ground, which Jill seemed to find as comfortable as moss, though Charlie would have preferred a bench or an expanse of soft leaves. She was wearing her usual shortened sailor togs—he had never seen her in a gown—and he himself was garbed in a larger, unshortened, but otherwise similar outfit of bell-bottom trousers, jacket, scarf, and round, flat cap.

He did not object to looking like a sailor, and he knew that small concessions were necessary if he was to win large ones from her, and at least to achieve a tentative truce between them and lessen her appalling ignorance on most subjects to be found in books. Only her knowledge about the flora and fauna of the Caribbean seemed extensive. Today he had listened for fifteen minutes to a lecture about the predatory fish in the seas around Oleander ("Not only sharks but barracudas, small but moody and you ought to see their teeth!"), and then he had insisted on the French.

But she stared down the hill.

"Miss Meynell, you may join your friends after we have covered six more verbs. So far we have covered two, and I think you have already forgotten them." Today as always he was quite alone in making demands of her. Mrs. Meynell was resting and not to be disturbed. The household staff, that is the old man and his muffled

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little son, avoided Jill as if she had typhoid fever, prehaps because she consorted with the Caribs, whom they looked upon as savages.

"Mr. Sorley, I am not in the least interested in your irregular verbs. I've decided they're unnecessary for conversing with the sailors on the boats from Martinique." Except in moments of anger, her speech, unlike her dress, was correct and curiously formal; she appeared to have learned rhetoric from her mother. "I can understand them already, and they don't worry about tenses." That morning Mrs. Meynell had insisted that she submit to a prolonged hair-brushing, and she looked almost like a girl, with a hint of prettiness which with years and cultivation could blossom into her mother's beauty. It was significant, though, that whenever Charlie thought of her looks, it was in terms of how she approached or fell short of her mother.

"Your mother has expressly asked me to teach you French. Do you want to disappoint her?" He knew that he sounded insufferable. There was something about being a tutor which made one act tutorial, superior, condescending.

"My mother is a beautiful woman with a spectacular bosom, as I've noticed you noticing. All the men do. No, I don't want to disappoint her. But I would rather speak Carib than French."

Charlie had never heard such frankness from a girl. But it was the truth of her observation rather than the frankness which stung him.

He slammed shut the book and shoved it into Jill's hand. "Study it or throw it in the lagoon, for all I care. I'm going for a walk."

"You were engaged to be my tutor."

"And you refuse to be tutored."

"Why don't you tutor me in history? I *love* battles, especially the bloody ones. Did you know that more than two thirds of the men died in the charge of the light brigade, and the whole thing was a mistake?"

If she was going to discuss battles, he could at least introduce her to some of the laureate's poetry, even his inferior poems:

"Into the valley of death
Rode the six hundred. . . ."

"That's one poem I already know," she interrupted. "Thanks to mother. I would just as soon study French as listen to Tennyson. He never fought in a battle. There's no *gore* in the poem."

"I'll see you at supper." He strode through the cassia trees and began his descent to the lagoon. At last he was coming for our daily visit! I caught sight of him as he emerged from the English village, and I made a double somersault in the air. Mrs. Meynell had told him that he was to have as much time to himself as he chose—"Jill

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is too trying for constant companionship—" and by this time, the end of his first week on the island, our visits had become regular and, at least on my part, anticipated with more pleasure than a school of slow-swimming mullets.

Only with me could he admit his loneliness. Only with me could he talk about his brother and his mother or describe his baffling confrontations with Jill, each of them, he felt, a resounding failure. Stripping off his shirt (and everything else when we swam to the far side of the lagoon), he would wade into the water and start, "I know you can't understand me, but," and I would snort, "Oh, but I can," and then he would tell me the events which you are now hearing in my history or he would rehearse a lesson in French or literature which he would later repeat to Jill. The frustration of our visits was that he had no idea I could understand him (even his French). Why would he not let me tutor him in my own language? From our several meetings, all he had learned was my name "Gloomer," which I had endlessly repeated in as human a fashion as I could manage with an airhole. As for his name, I could not enunciate the "Ch." "Arlie" was as close as I could come and he did not appear to recognize my approximation.

It is a human vanity to assume that every animal exists to be eaten, trapped, or taught, and even perceptive Charlie, though he did none of these things to me, did not guess that perhaps some animals could teach some humans. All he knew was that some animals could eat some humans. Delphinese is not as difficult as English or French. It is rich in verbs (without tenses) and nouns (without declensions), but lacks articles and minimizes prepositions. It is imagistic, picture-making, suggestive, rather than direct and logical. Dolphins from the seas around Japan say that it resembles Japanese, though it is much less difficult.

"So you see," he was ending, "I'm at a total loss as to how to reach that girl."

Materializing with her usual suddenness, she stalked onto the beach in time to hear his last sentence. I turned a frantic cartwheel to alert him but succeeded only in fixing his attention all the more intently on me. He laughed at what seemed to him my antics.

"Gloomer, you can always make me forget my troubles."

Plop!

The stone landed just beside my head and I streaked frantically for deep waters and only paused to turn and look when I was beyond the range of her powerful throwing arm. What I saw delighted me.

With infinite and unhurried

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dignity, Charlie waded ashore and confronted the culprit. At the same time, with the corner of his eye, he cast about for a piece of driftwood. Perhaps she thought that he meant to throw the wood for me to catch; certainly she did not anticipate his intentions toward her, the young mistress of the manor, until he loomed above her (not very tall, to be sure, but with an illusion of tallness, no, immensity), and, quick as a mongoose, snapped her over his knee and began to cane her with the driftwood. She screeched, she swore in English, French, and Carib, she struggled to kick or bite him, and she was a very strong, even if skinny, young girl. But she landed not a single blow or bite; she did not even break the rhythmic descent of the makeshift cane. It was not hard wood, and they were not hard blows; she would sustain no bruises except to her pride. But her very helplessness infuriated her more than physical pain.

When he had finished he stood up and tossed her out of his lap. She tumbled onto her knees. "And if you ever throw a rock at my friend again, you'll get worse than a caning."

She sat, woeful and defeated, on the hot black sand of the beach, her eyes were red and her lips were quivering. But she was not so much hurt and angry as dumbfounded by his boldness.

Feeling secure after Charlie's triumph, I swam within easier listening distance.

"Are you going to behave?" he demanded.

I had to crane my earholes. Her answer was scarcely audible. "Yes."

"You won't throw any more stones at Gloomer?"

"Not unless he tries to hurt me."

He held out his hand and lifted her to her feet. "He won't try to hurt you."

"But I *told* you what dolphins are like," she insisted. "They deserve to have rocks thrown at them. If you keep on swimming with the one out there, he'll surprise you some day and ram you the way he does a shark."

"Nonsense. He's the only friend I have on the island besides your mother. You have a terribly warped notion about dolphins. You must have gotten it from the Caribs."

She no longer tried to argue with him. Something had changed in their relationship. She had not really understood, I think, why he had punished her for throwing a rock at what seemed to her a cruel and hideous animal, but he had asserted his maleness, his mastery, he had overpowered her. He was no longer beneath contempt. He was worth, if not yet her understanding, at least her fascination. It frightened me to see the change.

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So long as they were open enemies, he would be on guard. But if they began to like each other, he would become vulnerable to her caprices, her latent femininity, and to something far more insidious: whatever it was which gave her such power on the island, over the English servants, the Caribs, and her mother.

"I will study the French now," she said.

"After I've had my swim." He waded into the water and for a full half an hour, while Jill waited with surprising patience, we streaked over the lagoon. For skimming the surface, he held loosely to my dorsal fin just as I had taught him, but by now he had learned to leap simultaneously with me from the water: he could tell from a sudden burst of speed that I planned a leap, and then as I rose under him he would grasp my body and fling himself upward in unison with me to lessen my burden, and we would break into the air like a single creature. We must have resembled a Triton to those on shore, body of man, tail of fish, showering drops beneath us like a tiny thunder squall. I lost no chance to show Jill that, even if I was a trifle stocky, she would never see a swifter and more agile dolphin; and I positively flaunted my friendship with Charlie. When he finally released my fin and gave me a parting hug, I swam after him, caught his ankle between my jaws, and tried to hold him for another swim. But he looked over his shoulder with mild reproof—he was never really cross with me—and I reluctantly loosed him to join that girl.

"You just won't be warned," she said to him on the beach.

"About Gloomer?" How sweet my name sounded on his lips, though his pronunciation lacked that whistling intonation which it possessed in Delphinese. "Come in the water one day and I'll show you how safe he is."

(Just let her try! I would restrain myself from ramming, but she would get the nip of her life.)

She shuddered. "I would just as soon be in a room with a bird. And I detest birds."

"You're afraid they would get in your hair?"

"I don't even like them outdoors. They're cruel and garish."

"But you have the loveliest birds I ever saw on Oleandra. All those bright colors. The trogon with its green and rose—"

She pointed to the black sand. "That's my favorite color."

"Then you ought to like Gloomer."

"He isn't really black. Dirty gray on top. Dirty white on the bottom. And anyway, it isn't his color I don't like. It's his character."

"You'll get to like him. I'll see to that. Now for some French."

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"Yes. Only . . ."

"Only what, Miss Meynell?"

"I waited half an hour for you. Don't you owe me a favor?"

"No, but you can ask for one."

"I want to show you my tree house. My *own* house. Nobody else goes there except Curk. It isn't far from here and you'll have a chance to dry off before we go back to the Red House."

He anticipated a tree house lodged among leafy branches, with a ladder of woven rushes to be raised or lowered at will—to invite guests or escape enemies—and a little room with a downy floor and a collection of prized objects saved from childhood—sea shells, toys, perhaps even a book about life in the sea or famous battles.

"Lead the way," he said, trying to sound as if he were doing her a favor. For the sake of his position he must not capitulate too readily. He looked back at me with real regret. "I wish Gloomer could go with us. How would you like to be trapped all your life in the water?"

"I expect he thinks *we're* trapped, don't you?" ("No," I snorted. "I'd *much* prefer the land.") "I think he's lucky myself. If you'd ever swum with Curk, you'd know it was, well, like the Carib notion of paradise. All those sea caves where the only light is noctilucae or phosphorus. The forests of seaweed right on the ocean floor. Have you ever seen an octopus underwater? As Curk says, they don't swim, they flow. There's nothing more beautiful than watching their eight legs making a little river behind them." There was that name again, the cryptic Curk. I desperately wanted Charlie to ask her about him, but she gave him no chance. She took his hand and pulled him away from the beach and out of my sight. I have rarely hated so much to see him leave because I knew—*knew*—that there was something unpleasant in store for him. When Jill was hateful, she was at least predictable; she threw stones. When she was happy, who could predict her behavior?

The tree house was not lodged among the blossoms of a shower-of-gold or fragrantly entwined with the boughs of a frangipani. It was hidden in the heart of that arboreal freak, a banyan tree, whose slender trunk flared into countless branches which not only dipped to touch the earth, but grew *into* the earth (or were they roots growing *out* of the earth?), so that you felt the one tree was a whole little forest. It is a curious, even an interesting tree, but full of shifting shadows and almost sinister. It might be likened to a forest of immense sea anemones. Dolphins avoid such forests because they conceal giant squids and moray eels.

"But where is the house?"

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Charlie asked. "All I see are branches."

With true pride of ownership, she led him into the network, sidestepping, circling, climbing over a branch which grew along the ground like a snake before piercing the earth.

"Here," she said. She brushed aside a carpet of leaves and pointed to a trap door, a square of banyan wood with a brass, piratical-looking handle. "Here's my house." They climbed down a ladder—not the charming gossamer one of rushes which Charlie had fancied, but crooked and jagged and cut down the side of a big root, and found themselves in a chamber so dark that Charlie could not even tell its dimensions.

"I love the dark," said Jill. "Listen. You can hear my friends."

He could hear an ominous rustling over dry leaves. "Haven't you a lamp?" he asked a bit nervously. Even stout English schoolboys are afraid of snakes in the dark on a strange island.

"I can see in the dark," she said.

"I can't see a thing except the square of light around the trap door."

"Very well, then. I don't want you to miss anything." She busied herself invisible in the dark for what seemed to Charlie long enough for both of them to be bitten by snakes and finally lit a paraffin lamp.

He blinked to assure himself that the dim light was not deceiving him.

"But it's a tomb," he cried at last. "There're skeletons all over the place."

"You talk as if they were just strewn about," she reproved him. "They are *laid to rest,* and there is a great difference. You're right, though, this used to be a Carib burial vault, but there's something so tranquil and sacred about it. You're in the midst of death and you see how beautiful it is. And look at my friends, how happy they are here!"

She knelt and touched her hand to a skeleton, and a huge tarantula climbed leg over hairy leg up her arm. The legs looked sinewy even beneath the hair. He knew the jumping power of those furry beasts.

"The light frightens them. You have to make them feel at ease."

"They're quite deadly, aren't they?" he said in what emerged as a whisper.

"Little worse than a bee sting. Unless of course a lot of them bite you. And they do tear the skin. But they know their friends."

"Are there many of them down here?"

"Ten adults and thirty or so babies. It's hard to keep track of the young."

He slapped at a tickle on his wrist and, without looking, was sure that he had reduced the

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young to twenty-nine. He was glad that she did not keep exact count. Already he was groping for the ladder.

"Where are you going?" she demanded. "You're with me. They won't hurt you."

"They may not recognize me as a friend."

Silently she followed him up the ladder, and they stood together outside the kapok tree looking at each other with that total failure of communication which is all the more painful because both persons have genuinely tried to communicate. He knew that she had brought him here in good faith, that she had not expected to endanger or frighten him. It was her first real gesture of friendship. But the room to him had seemed worse than frightening; it had seemed hideous. He looked at his trousers to make sure that no tarantula had ridden him up the ladder.

Her lips were quivering. He had never seen tears on her cheeks, but he could always tell when she wanted to cry. "You didn't like my house," she said. It was not an accusation as much as an expression of despair.

"It wasn't what I expected. It was so dark, and then the spiders—"

"But they're beautiful. I can watch them for hours. All that black glossy fur like a wolf—I never saw a real wolf, but I have a picture of one in a geography book. And the green eyes. Of course it was too dark for you to see the eyes down there, but you ought to look at them in the daylight."

"But the skeletons. Don't you feel uncomfortable with them lying all around you?"

"Oh, no, those were Carib kings and queens you saw. They were laid out in state and they still wear aquamarine pendants around their necks to ward off evil spirits. I wish I could be buried there. I wish I were a Carib too! Not like the ones you see on Oleandra. I love them, but they're weak and degenerate. Bad little children who have to be made to mind. Curk himself says so. But they were a great people before Columbus came and the Spaniards started stealing their lands. You can see what they were like from Curk."

"What's wrong with being English? Your mother is a charming woman."

She paused and said thoughtfully, "I love my mother. I really do. But I don't respect her. She's soft. She's always being sick and going to bed. It's only Curk who keeps the Caribs working for her. Without him, they'd strip the house and pack her off to Martinique on the next boat. Or worse."

"Curk. The Man Who Swims With the Sharks. He must be very brave."

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"Yes!" Her eyes glowed greenly like those of the tarantulas she had described. Not with evil but simply without goodness. Unconcerned with laws and customs. But whether the expression belonged to her or the man she was reflecting, it was hard to say. Perhaps to both. "He's the bravest man in the world. The last of the Carib kings. You saw him when you first came to the Red House."

"I caught just a glimpse of him. He was the one who ordered the carriers away, wasn't he?"

"Yes. You'll see a lot more of him. This is his island, and it was his idea to—"

"To what, Jill?" For the first time, he had used her given name.

"To bring you here. It wasn't my idea. *I* didn't want anyone except Curk. That's why I was so hateful to you at first. But he said I needed you. And then, on the beach a little while ago, I thought—I thought maybe he was right. You were like him for a while. You hurt me so beautifully. I didn't know why at first. That it was because I had thrown a rock at that stupid dolphin. But you were your own law, and that was enough. But now I just don't know."

Charlie was incredulous. "It was *his* idea for you to have a tutor?"

"That was the excuse he gave mother. He knew she really did want me taught. How to be a lady. How to enjoy poetry. How to speak French. And she wanted company. So he encouraged her to write Mr. Lane. She asked for a poet type, and a good-looking one at that. But Curk put in the part about the sciences. He taught himself to read and write, you know. He respects knowledge immensely, though his own reading has been mostly in the Bible—he can recite the Book of Kings word for word. And he insisted on your being a fine athlete. Mother didn't know what he really had in mind. Or if she knew, she pretended not to, because she felt she shouldn't approve of such a thing. She's very good at closing her eyes. Like a stork."

"Ostrich."

"That's it. Ostrich. It's the stork that brings the babies in those stupid children's books. Mother's an ostrich. So you see you had to be all kinds of things to us. A poet for mother. An athlete for Curk and to make the Caribs respect you. And virile because—" She began to stammer. She groped for the words which usually spilled from her tongue like petals from a shower-of-gold tree or, depending on her mood, like venom from the fangs of a fer-de-lance.

He said with the desperation of dawning knowledge: "I still don't know what you're trying to tell me."

"That you must give me strong children."

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VII

He had brought her to the beach by means of a path which tumbled like a stream down the crater side, veering, swooping, narrowing between lemon and calamondin trees and expanding onto terraces green with cacao plants. At the end of the path he had to lift her from the burro and support her to the edge of the water.

I had watched his descent from the lagoon, and my dorsal fin had stiffened with pride, almost like a plume, because they were coming to see *me*.

"And this," he said proudly, "is Gloomer."

In spite of evident fatigue, Mrs. Meynell was fully as beautiful as Charlie had led me to anticipate. She was wearing a croquet dress—one of those gowns which English ladies don for the out-of-doors—but quite as voluminous as a gown for a ball.

He himself had walked, leading both Mrs. Meynell's burro and a pack animal laden with cushions, coverlets, and viands for a picnic. He began to make her a nest under a carob tree which grew close to the water. But she insisted first on standing and visiting with me. Her mysterious malady, her reluctance to leave her bed, she had never identified, and Charlie had always ascribed it to her dependence on laudanum. I suspected a more sinister explanation. At any rate, she was never totally bedridden.

I had swum so close to shore that I was in real danger of floundering on the sand. But I knew that Charlie would hasten to my rescue and drag me, tail first, into deep waters. I wriggled along the bottom like a stingray for the closest possible view of her.

You know how critical I am of new acquaintances, but Charlie had predisposed me in her favor, and when I found that he had not exaggerated, I lost my heart to her. Such a lush and soft-curving creature! Such a generosity of bosom! It was hard to realize that weedy Jill had been spawned by this voluptuous Amphitrite.

What is more, she did not condescend to me. "Gloomer," she said, as if she knew that I could understand her, which of course I could. "Charlie has told me about his friend in the lagoon, and I want to tell you how honored I am to pay you a visit. I often watch you from my window, and you're the most beautiful swimmer I've ever seen. I'm glad Charlie has such a friend." (If she watched me, she must also watch Charlie. Really, he ought to wear a bathing suit!)

By this time Charlie had completed the nest under the carob tree—swept the ground clean of pods, arranged a pillow and coverlet—but all the while he had been

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watching Mrs. Meynell and me out of the corner of his eye and judging how well his friends liked each other. Our amenities exchanged and our friendship established, he settled Mrs. Meynell against the tree, a cushion at her back, and poured her a cup of punch—rum and fruit juices, lime, papaya, and pineapple, mixed to a liquid ambrosia—from a silver flagon with a head like that of a greyhound. While Charlie walked to the edge of the water to greet me, she drank the punch with the avidity of a mariner rescued from a raft in a tropical sun. Charlie unwrapped a parcel and drew out a large decapitated mullet (of course, we never eat their heads. *That* would be barbarous.) which he presented to me as if I were the third member of the picnic. I took it from his fingers and crunched and swallowed it with grateful zest. Returning to the carob tree, he prepared to pour himself some punch, but Mrs. Meynell blandly held out her cup, which he refilled with some surprise. Being none too fastidious in my own gastronomical habits (except when it comes to mullet heads), I could sympathize with her. Ladies were expected to sip their beverages, but Mrs. Meynell had every right to gulp after so taxing a journey.

The mullet was settling into my second stomach when a loud, reproving voice disturbed my digestion and my daydreams. Jill approached the tree with the bad temper of an excluded guest. She and Charlie had not met since she had confessed the reason why Curk had brought him to the island. They had carefully avoided each other, and now she appeared to have worked herself into a rage.

"Mother will be sick all night from this outing you've dragged her on," she snapped. "Are you my tutor or her self-appointed physician?"

"I asked Charlie to bring me," Mrs. Meynell replied with some asperity. "Here, Jill, join us under the tree."

"I haven't any appetite," she said. "That creature in the water turns my stomach. He's watching every move we make. It's as if—as if he were trying to be one of us."

"He *is* one of us," Charlie said.

"Then I'm not." She flounced up the trail toward the house.

Charlie looked after her with the anger he could only feel in behalf of an insulted friend.

"Never mind," I wanted to say—*did* say in my usual, to him, unrecognizable wheeze. "I have my friends with me. What do I care about a petulant child?"

But Jill was not a child, and her petulance was more like the anger of a rejected woman.

Charlie was exuberant. "Do you realize that this has been your most active day yet? You were out

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of bed three hours this afternoon."

"Three hours? Three months! My dear, I am one continuous ache. I feel as if I have been nailed in a barrel and rolled over a waterfall." She nestled gratefully into her pillows. "And half the time jostling on the back of a burro, which I haven't ridden for two years."

"It was the only way for you to get to the lagoon. You'd never have managed it on foot."

"Or without you to keep me on the burro. I don't know which of you carried more of me."

"But don't you see," Charlie expostulated, "you *had* to meet Gloomer. And he couldn't very well come to you."

"I'm glad I met him," she said, suddenly serious. "Every day I've watched you swim in the lagoon, and Gloomer has been with you."

"He's my friend."

"Never swim without him, Charlie."

"Oh, I can handle myself in the water all right. You know how many rivers we have in England."

"A river is not a lagoon. *Never swim without him.*" The words were a commandment.

"I don't intend to. He keeps me company."

"Keeps you company? He's more than a pet, isn't he?"

"He's my best friend."

"Your best friend," she mused. "Of course he is. He isn't a fish at all, is he? He's a mammal, and mammals are suckled by their mothers. They learn how to love. He can be a stout friend to you in the water. But the shore, Charlie. How can he help you here?"

"Why should I need help, Elizabeth?" He spoke her given name for the first time, and without embarrassment; indeed with pleasure. Elizabeth. It was a storied name. A great queen; a beloved poet. It had a resonance as well as a history. Yes, it suited her.

"Did you know there were once Africans on this island? A slave ship was wrecked on the coast, and there must have been a hundred Negroes at one time living quite happily along these slopes."

"What happened to them?"

"The Caribs gave a great feast and invited the Africans as guests of honor. They even asked the mothers to bring their babies. Once the Africans were thoroughly drunk on fermented cassava juice, the Caribs roasted and ate them as if they were suckling pigs."

Charlie shuddered. "I knew they were cruel," he said. "The day I landed on Oleandra, one of them threw a stone at Gloomer and the others laughed. But cannibals—"

She pressed his hand. "The Caribs were notorious in their early days. But that was centuries ago. That is why they have almost been exterminated through these is-

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lands—first by the Spanish, then the English, then the Africans. You'll find a few isolated colonies—on Dominica—here on Oleandra. In most places they are no longer numerous enough to be a threat."

"But what about you and Jill? You have two servants in your house. Counting you, Jill, and me, there are only five Englishmen on the whole island. There must be forty or more Caribs."

"Thirty. They seem more numerous than they are because they look so much alike. It's easy to count the same one twice."

"Suppose they gave a feast—"

She shook her head. "We have need of each other, the Caribs and I. Jill and I are quite safe from them, and so are you unless—unless you make someone very angry. Do you understand me, Charlie?"

"I think I do."

"And you must caution your friend Gloomer to keep out of their reach. To them, he's just another fish to be caught and eaten."

"He isn't edible," said Charlie. "The kind of dolphin you eat is a true fish and much smaller."

"Charlie, Charlie. Always the teacher. If they couldn't eat him, they would kill him just for the sport of it and feed his carcass to the sea gulls."

"If they did," said Charlie brusquely, "there would be five or six fewer Caribs on the island." His voice softened. "*You* liked him, didn't you? I could see that at once. And he liked you."

"Jill doesn't like him, though."

"No, and I'm not sure why except that she finds him ugly. He's never done anything to her—teased or frightened her. But he doesn't like her either. She won't go in the water when he's close by. Do you think he reminds her of a shark?"

Elizabeth looked at him fixedly before she spoke. "My daughter is not in the least afraid of sharks. I would say, rather, that she dislikes him because he does *not* remind her of a shark. Because dolphins and sharks are hereditary enemies. Now you must leave me, Charlie. I'm very tired."

"Because of me," he said ruefully.

"Yes, because of you. But it's a happy tiredness. Not that long, gray weariness which seems to have no cause and no conclusion. I haven't been so happy since I left England."

He left her and thought with surprise and guilt: I have not been sad all day . . .

But he came back to her in an hour, wearing his nightdress and carrying a taper, because he was afraid that he had overtaxed her strength; that his well-meant enthusiasm had condemned her to a night of pain and sleeplessness. Really, his escapade had been inexcusable for a mature young man

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of nineteen. To coax an invalid from her bed and onto the back of a burro—

There was no scent of laudanum in the air. She was lying on her back with open eyes, and she smiled at him without surprise.

He knelt and kissed her cheek. "You haven't taken your laudanum. Can you sleep without it?"

"I wanted to lie awake a while and remember the day." As always a scent of frangipani hovered about her like an invisible cloak. She had combed her hair around her shoulders, and far from accenting her years, she appeared to be ageless, blooming, eternal—a saffron Ceres, an earth mother (but no longer his own mother) who had lost her daughter but kept her beauty through uncountable winters of grief.

"I've come to say good-night."

She patted his head. "I thought you already had."

"Not in those exact words. I merely *implied* a good night."

"You were afraid you had overtaxed me?"

"Yes."

"No. No, my dear, you have given me strength of a very precious kind."

He astonished himself with his next pronouncement. "I'm going to stay with you again."

"Not tonight, Charlie. The thought of you will companion me. Your actual presence—well, it *would* overtax my strength."

"I surely won't tire you if I hold you in my arms. You may consider me an extra pillow."

She assumed an air of flippancy. "Your chest is admirable but for softness mine is superior. You would get the best of the arrangement."

"Try the crook of my shoulder. It's expressly made to cradle a head."

"You won't understand," she blurted in one of her sudden and baffling changes of mood. "The other time—it was all very well for you, the charitable young man, to please a neurotic lady's whim. You could preen yourself on your sacrifice. But now your charity, as well as your chastity, is beginning to stifle me."

"You think I came out of charity?" he protested. "Not the first time and certainly not now."

"Out of loneliness then. You wanted to be mothered. But I don't feel maternal at the moment. In your nightdress you look like a good-natured banshee, but I have watched you swim in the lagoon without a stitch, and my conception of you is quite robust. I have already lost one night of sleep to your platonic endearments. I told you what I am—a loose, immoral woman—and yet you come a second time to offer me brotherhood. Save that for Gloomer."

He did not try to conceal his hurt. "We talk too much and un-

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derstand too little. Sometimes I feel I know Gloomer better than any friend I have, and neither can understand a word the other says."

In spite of her protestations, he held her in his arms with gentleness and yet with a certain insistence which was not to be denied. He felt the rigidity ebb from her body.

In a tiny voice she said, "Stay then. But not for the night. Just for an hour or two."

Her invalidism excited his pity; her beauty, his desire. Dimly he recognized those weaknesses of character which had led her to mock him at times and even, in a way which he could not explain, to endanger him. He was coming to sense that Oleandra was as beautiful and poisonous as the flower for which it was named, and that Elizabeth herself had imbibed some of the poison. But now was no time for moral judgments. Now was the time to make love to her. Not to the shadowy Annabelle Lee of that other night, but to a woman of flesh and blood who in her own curious way, half maternal, half amorous, ashamed and yet proud, needed him with a longing urgency. The perfume which was her distinctive scent, distilled in part from the frangipani, seemed to speak for her, to say that in some ways she was staunch and pure like the tree, and yet the soft, at times almost cloying sweetnesses mingled with the frangipani were the faults, the evasions, the yieldings which had kept her from fullest stature. But who was he to judge her, he who had fled from England rather than face his grief? A true lover was never a judge.

He knew that he had not been wrong to preserve his chastity for such a time. He had not been wrong to resist the urges of friends who waited for harlots behind the music hall and boasted of nights in beds surrounded by mirrors and lit by a hundred tapers. Darkness was the proper state for love, because love was its own light, and it glowed like a Japanese lantern, warming and illuminating; in this case, a fragile thing, perhaps, bamboo and paper and not wrought iron; evanescent, perhaps, who could say? But exquisite.

He had heard from his friends—he had read in the copies of Ovid and Catullus secreted under the covers of his bed at Marlborough—that passion must be inflamed by an exchange of calculated caresses and whispered obscenities, that kisses must mount from gentleness to ferocity, embraces to a savage climax. But he took her without calculation, with an unstudied tenderness which redeemed his inexperience.

Was he better, you may ask, than his furtive, lecherous friends because, in this canopied bed, he loved with splendor instead of se-

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crecy and squalor? Loved a lady instead of a harlot? Yes, a resounding yes. He could love without guilt because he did not betray his own high code. Because to Charlie the only sin in "love-making" was really "loveless-making," the sin of estranging the heart and the body, when the body took what it wanted, exulted in fleshly conquest, while the heart looked on, a bemused and envious stranger.

To a dolphin there is no marriage and no constancy between lovers, and "love" is a word reserved for friends, parents, and children. Male and female perform in an endless play of amorous dalliance, grow fond of each other, exchange gifts of sea anemones or pink coral, but change partners with the restlessness and readiness of dancers at an English waltz. The mother adores her child, but the child's father—if indeed she knows his identity—she treats with the same lighthearted camaraderie as her other lovers. It was not so with Charlie. His heart and his body, acting in loving concert, were unestranged. He would love again; he would love more deeply perhaps; never more sweetly.

His last word to her, almost the only word he spoke in all that time, was "Elizabeth." It was the second time he had used her given name, an extraordinary boldness for one of his years and his position in her home as the tutor of her child, and yet he used it without presumption, without possession. She was no longer the great lady of the manor house but one who, like himself, had lit her loneliness with a lantern of love.

Drowsily, ebbing into sleep, he wondered if he heard or dreamed her answer.

"Thank you, my dear. Thank you. Now you must go."

He had not believed her when she had promised him a few hours. He had expected the night. He was shocked into wakefulness.

"Because—?"

"Of him."

(to be concluded next month)

In the August issue of VENTURE Science Fiction

BEASTCHILD, a complete new novel by **Dean R. Koontz:** *The Naoli had struck first, their goal being the complete destruction of the human race, and they had been almost 100% successful. There were isolated survivors, of course, even rumors of a hideaway called The Haven; but for Hulann, a Naoli achaeologist with the occupation forces, the battle was no longer with the humans but with his own guilt, a conflict that would lead him to the terrible truth about the war.* VENTURE, the best in action science fiction, is on sale at your newsstand or available from Mercury, Box 271, Rockville Centre, N. Y. 11571—60¢.

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BOOKS

John Lymington: TEN MILLION YEARS TO FRIDAY. Doubleday, 1970. 203 pp., boards, $4.50

Lymington is a British novelist who first appeared in 1962, and this book, first published in London in 1967, is almost the standard product of the mainstream writer who tries to write science fiction without, apparently, ever having read any, and without, obviously, any knowledge whatsoever of any science. This latter ignorance the author tries to cover by making his first-person hero a newspaperman who repeatedly protests his failure to understand science; but there also are two scientists in the story who talk absolute nonsense (Lymington's magic formula is "fantastic frequency"), and worse, the situation too is nonsense.

The plot concerns the release from a bubble in the Earth of some sort of super-Being which had been accidentally imprisoned there ten million years ago, when there were only "small brown men" (p. 103) and before the Moon had split off from the Earth (p. 48). It is just barely possible that *Australopithecus,* or a related gorilla-like form, was extant something under two million years ago—certainly not ten; while the splitting off of the Moon from the Earth (if it ever happened at all) must be dated at about 4.5 *billion* years ago, give or take a hundred million, and in any event long before the origin of the simplest forms of life. This is not simply a newspaperman's muddle over dates, because no matter how one juggles the figures, there cannot have been life of any kind—let alone human life—on the hypothetical Earth/Moon protoplanet.

All of Lymington's notions about scientific matters are in a similar state of collapse, the result not only of ignorance but what seems to be arrogant indifference: at one point the hero gets the speed of light wrong, and tells you that he's probably got it wrong, though it would be a lousy reporter who wouldn't step to the nearest dictionary (no more esoteric reference work would be needed) to check so fundamental

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a physical constant. In compensation, the story is constantly awash in headaches, nausea, attempted sensations of terror, sweat, tears, dizziness, hysterics, etc., all of which serve only to make the hero—who is a veteran of several wars—sound like he would be carried fainting from the theater after the first ten minutes of "Frankenstein Meets Abbott and Costello."

In the end, we are given to understand that the tiny Cornish town which is the scene of all the action has been hit by a minimum of four nuclear warheads, and that this whole story has therefore been reconstructed from a typescript "some of it charred brown but still just readable" (p. 195) and some tapes, ditto. If I read this right, it indicates that Mr. Lymington hasn't read Hersey's HIROSHIMA, let alone "The Effects of Atomic Weapons" (AEC, June 1950), and had better scuttle back to the historical novel as fast as his little legs will carry him.

Julius Fast: THE LEAGUE OF GREY-EYED WOMEN. Lippincott, 1970. 219 pp., boards, $5.95

Lippincott, tippy-toeing past a dirty word, calls this "partly science, partly fiction, and just a little beyond tomorrow's headlines," and it is an interesting example of the kind of thing a large publisher tries to slip past our category into the mainstream. It is pure, hard science-fiction, unlike the Lymington, which though labelled science-fiction is just a fake. Mr. Fast, whose first novel this is, is a medical journalist, and he knows all his backgrounds—medicine, genetics, the specialized world of the New York advertising agency handling pharmaceutical accounts—with great thoroughness, so much so that he seems at ease with them and seldom gives the appearance of lecturing even when in fact he is. All this expertise is used to prop up and make plausible a fairly far-out story of lycanthropy and telepathy, very well constructed both in plot and in pacing.

I have a "but" up my sleeve, however. The narrative convention within which Fast has chosen to tell this story—perhaps without being aware of it—is that of the woman's-magazine novel, or Dagwood sandwich. To produce this, one takes the bread (a good story) and slices it very thin; and between the slices go great slabs of various kinds of filling, such as menus, interior decorating hints, masterful female characters, restaurant travelogues, soap-opera dialogue, young men who need mothering, glamorous professions, and so on. In the magazines, these ingredients serve the obvious function of directing the reader toward the related advertisements, but in

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a book, where there are no such distractions running in columns down each side of the page, they tend to give the reader the sensation of trying to hear the narrative from the bottom of a sea of mayonnaise.

Two steps forward, one step back: Lymington's prose is much better than Fast's, though he is much worse in most other departments. I repeat, Fast's story is a good one, and, most unexpectedly, its climax is magnificently funny. The book will win no prizes, but I think it would be a very good bet for a paperback publisher.

Nevertheless, it saddens me; it could have been so much better, and the convention is so useless, too. The woman's-magazine novel is nearly dead; and the kind of science fiction that is being *written* by women these days—e.g., Ursula LeGuin, Anne McCaffrey, Joanna Russ—pays no attention to these silly four-color props; whereas the kind of standard upper middle class WASP female to which this convention may once have appealed would never have gotten past the very first of Mr. Fast's carefully sugar-coated but fundamentally difficult basic notions.

I hope he will read some more and try again.

D. G. Compton: THE STEEL CROCODILE. Ace Books, 1970. 254 pp., paper, 75¢

And here is a further case in point. The first of David Compton's s-f novels to be published in the United States (SYNTHAJOY Ace, 1969) was written entirely from a woman's point of view, and so convincingly that I was sure the author was a woman (in fact I think I referred to the author as "she" in a review). The present work, which is not a reprint but an original for Ace, has a split viewpoint between man and wife, but again I would have assumed that a woman was the author, had the flap copy not astonished me by upsetting this impression. And yet, Compton conveys his feeling of utterly feminine depth, warmth and special concerns without invoking one single magazine cliche, not one recipe, not one moment of chintziness, not one stock reaction, not even one trace of the bitchiness which creeps into the work of almost every male author who has a broad feminine or pseudo-feminine streak in him, or thinks he has. It's all done by insight, and pretty stunning it is, too.

The novel is populated chiefly by a group of high-powered scientists, all specialists in different fields, and Compton has, by God, gotten their talk right, all of them . . . about as far a reach from Lymington's "fantastic frequency" as could be imagined. Furthermore, it is About Something: the social responsibility of the scien-

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tist. The experts are gathered in an Institute which officially is using a highly advanced computer to analyze and synthesize research from all over the world, and distribute the resulting discoveries and report on their implications to member European countries. In addition, however, the Institute is covertly making decisions to suppress some discoveries, release others in a highly selective way, and generally engaging in social engineering.

All this is theologically offensive to the hero's wife, a Roman Catholic, and politically offensive to her brother, a revolutionary. And there is still a bigger and more secret project under way, about which I shan't be specific, which brings all the personal, philosophical and dramatic conflicts (including a murder mystery) to a head and provides a fine penultimate irony.

The characterization is strong and stylistically the book is impeccable. Mr. Compton is a late starter in our field (he was born in 1930) but very clearly he knows what it is for, and how to get there, and is going to give both our older stars and our younger comets some severe competition. Recommended (or did you guess?).

Avram Davidson: THE PHOENIX AND THE MIRROR. Ace Special, 75¢; Doubleday, $4.95

I devoutly hope that this beautiful book, first of a projected series, was published late enough last year to qualify it for an award in 1970, for surely no better fantasy has been published in English since E. R. Eddison's last (and sadly incomplete) Zimiamvian novel.

I quote the flap copy, which for once is accurate and germane: "A curious legend arose during the Dark Ages—as ancient civilizations were crumbling in the shadows of the past—which described the poet Vergil as an all-powerful sorcerer. In time, strange tales transformed his life into fantasies of occult secrets and heroic deeds." This is the setting for the novel, which though inspired by the legends does not use any of them, though, Davidson says, future episodes may draw upon them.

It should be noted also that this legend of Vergil Magus, though a product of the Dark Ages, did not get written down until medieval times; so that Davidson's milieu is that of the Roman Empire of the first century B.C., as viewed through the eyes of people living about the 9th century A.D.—who knew almost nothing about Vergilian Rome and thus transformed it into an analogue of the Holy Roman Empire—and told in the language of 14th century Arthurian romance, as handled by a 20th century man who has absorbed ev-

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ery trick of the narrator's trade which has been developed since. Thus, to begin with, the novel is a staggering *tour de force,* and I know of no living writer but Davidson sufficiently learned, let alone sufficiently gifted, to bring it off.

He brings it off flawlessly, despite several additional self-imposed handicaps, of which the most important is his avoidance of the existing anecdotes about Vergil Magus. The story begins simply: Vergil, at the height of his powers, is required for compelling personal reasons to undertake an almost impossible work of magic, the construction of a *speculum majoram* or virgin mirror. As he pursues this task, the plot, the characterization and the implications become steadily more complex, requiring the author to become more fertile in invention almost page by page, and thus increasing the degree of control he must exercise over the material. (And, let me remind you, without losing control of the complex cross-cultural assumptions and the synthetic style which reflects them.)

I have written one historical novel set in the 13th century, and insofar as Davidson's material overlaps mine, I can vouch for its entire accuracy; but his task was much greater than the one I attempted, so that the overlap serves only to assure me that I can have confidence in those areas which are strange to me.

Moreover, the language is magnificent. Highly competent prose, like Compton's, is satisfying, and rare; but to encounter in a new book a truly distinguished and unique prose style is an experience which makes reading what it should be, a major part of the life of the mind and the heart.

This book has been incubating a long time—I think Avram first mentioned it to me in 1960 or thereabouts, when we were next door neighbors in Milford—and one can see why. It was eminently worth the wait. We stand here in the presence of an inarguable work of art; and, if the eventual whole corpus does no more than maintain the present level of achievement, of an enduring one. If—as I think wholly likely—the whole is greater than this first part, we will have been present at the birth of a masterpiece.

—JAMES BLISH

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Jon Lucas ("Repeat Business," June 1969) returns with a very funny story about — as the title so eloquently suggests — a machine that makes eggs. You may think that you know where this one is going, but we bet you'll be surprised.

THE SELF-PRIMING SOLID-STATE ELECTRONIC CHICKEN

by Jon Lucas

R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.
7 June 1970

GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Genius Inventions, Inc.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Sirs:

I am writing to you with regards to your advertisement in the Farm and Home Magazine where it says "Inventors Wanted." Since I am the inventor of a number of useful inventions, and one in particular which is sure to be a big success, I am sure you will want to get in touch with me right away.

Yours truly,
Emerson J. Minnick

9 June 1970

Mr. Emerson J. Minnick
R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.

Dear Mr. Minnick:

Thank you for your inquiry of June 7th. I am sending you under separate cover our pamphlet entitled "Think Your Way To Millions!" which explains the large profits to be made from marketing original inventions to industry.

As stated in the pamphlet and in the advertisement which attracted your attention, no ex-

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perience is necessary. You are no doubt aware that Leonardo da Vinci and Thomas Edison, to mention only two of the most successful inventors, had no degrees in engineering or any field of science, and there is no reason why you cannot follow their example.

I await your reply with interest.

Most sincerely yours,
John Wallen, Pres.

R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.
12 June, 1970

Genius Inventions, Inc.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Mr. Wallen:

I have read your pamphlet from cover to cover and am convinced that your company is the right type for me to be associated with. I note what you say in regards to a contract and you can go ahead and send it to me. I will not have any use for the course in drafting and engineering lessons which is also offered as I already know how to invent things and only need to get them patented and sold to the Big Manufacturers like it says. As soon as I receive the contract I will sign it and send you one of my inventions to start with. I think my Self-Priming Solid-State Electronic Chicken is the best one to start with, as it is sure fire.

Yours truly,
Emerson J. Minnick

GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

14 June 1970

Mr. Emerson J. Minnick
R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.

Dear Mr. Minnick:

Thank you for your letter of 12 June, advising that you wish to sign our Contract Form 3378-A. You will find two of these forms, signed by me, enclosed with this letter. Please fill out both of them and return one with a copy of your plans and your remittance, on receipt of which we will start at once the necessary arrangements for patenting and developement of your invention.

Trusting that this will be satisfactory, and taking the liberty of offering my congratulations on your decision, I am,

Most sincerely yours,
John Wallen, Pres.

R.F.D.68
Petaluma, Calif.
17 June 1970

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Genius Inventions, Inc.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Mr. Wallen:

I don't understand. It says here in the contract that I am supposed to send you Five Hundred Dollars ($500.00). I don't understand that. I don't see why a big rich company like yours should have to have Five Hundred Dollars from me, especially when you are getting half interest in an invention that will make a whole lot of money for you. Don't forget you got a right to keep half the profits like it says. Please write to me right away and clear this up.

Yours truly,
Emerson J. Minnick

GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

21 June 1970

Mr. Emerson J. Minnick
R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.

Dear Mr. Minnick:

Your letter of 17 June has been received, and I am sorry to see that you have failed to understand the terms of our Contract 3378-A. Apparently you do not realize the necessity of our securing a deposit of five hundred dollars as a guarantee of good faith and sincerity. Surely, Mr. Minnick, you can see that we wish to deal only with responsible, serious-minded people, who are sincere in their desire to achieve fame and fortune by benefiting Mankind through their inventions. We believe you are of that type, and that you will be fair enough to appreciate our motives.

Furthermore, we cannot tell how successful your invention might be until it has been checked by our Division of Development and Research. And just imagine the cost of applying for a patent by the United States Government at Washington, D.C.! And yet this is necessary to prevent unprincipled persons from stealing your work and manufacturing it without paying you a cent! It is these expenses that the contract requires you to share, among one or two others. You receive a receipt, of course, and as soon as the profits start rolling in your money will be returned—an investment you will never regret.

Please let me know your decision at once, as we cannot offer such an opportunity indefinitely.

Very truly yours,
John Wallen, Pres.

R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.
23 June 1970

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Genius Inventions, Inc.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Mr. Wallen:

I am sending you a money order for Five Hundred Dollars ($500.00) and one copy of the contract all signed and the full plans for my invention, The Self-Priming Solid-State Electronic Chicken. I am sorry if I hurt your feelings by what I said in my last letter as I did not just understand. Of course I can see now where you are perfectly right. I am certainly pleased and proud to feel that I am partners with a fine company like Genius Inventions, Inc., and I am sure we will both be very glad I saw your ad in the good old Farm and Home Magazine.

I hope you will not have any trouble understanding my plans. As you can see, the machine will produce eggs just the same as a chicken's eggs when you put the ingredients I listed in the hopper and turn it on. Most of them you can get at the drugstore, as I did here in Petaluma, but the Calcium I got at a feed store. I guess you have those in Los Angeles too. I can't send the working model because it is too big, so I will take advantage of Clause 6 of the contract where it says your Research and Development Division will build one from my plans so you can show the manufacturers. As already mentioned, I do not have any tecknicle knowledge of engineering, so on the plans where it shows a resistor or a transformer or something I have cut out the picture of it I got from the Radio & Electronics Magazine and pasted it in with lines showing where the wires go. I hope it will be all right. The little tube where it says "yolk" injection I got from a milking machine and it is rubber but I guess plastic will do.

Well, this will be all until I hear from you again.

Yours truly,
Emerson J. Minnick

GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

26 June 1970

Richard Sanders
Dept. 16-L
Richardson Aerospace Center

Dick:

Well, here we are again. Things are looking up, baby! The old sugar is still trickling in and just this morning I got a cute blue money order for five hundred fish. That's right, Dick my lad, the mark struck and struck hard on good old 3378-A. This one's right down your alley, so put on your R & D cap and get cracking. I wanted to catch you while you were still on shift, which is why

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I've sent this to your lab instead of leaving it at the pad. I hope you don't have a snoopy mail clerk there.

Now hang on to your hat, 'cause this is a good one. This guy figures he's invented a machine that makes *eggs!* You know, like a chicken, except there's no chicken. You just pour in a bit of this and that (there's a list attached to his plan) and turn it on and it starts making eggs. His plans, what I could make out of them—they seem to be written on the back of a feed bag or something—say it makes an egg every 65 seconds, or oftener if you turn the grade switch from AA to A or even B. I figure this one's good for the standard follow-up and from the sound of this guy we might ride it as long as we did with that mark that dreamed up the Laser-Beam Lawnmower. I've told him the five C's is for the patent application (don't these guys *ever* read the law?) and I'll give him a day or two and then tell him about the patent search fee. He's already saved me one step by suggesting himself that we work up a model, so you'd better start thinking about swiping some more convincing-looking components unless you think you've got enough up at the pad. You ought to see these plans, Dick. They look like a cross between a Pop Art collage and a schoolgirl's scrapbook, but that's your department, so I'll bring 'em with me this evening and we'll have a confab about it. I think we'd better actually go ahead and build this one, Dick. It's going to take me a while to forget that guy from Elko, Nevada, who showed up that night and discovered we'd only made a simulation for the photo. He was a very ugly customer. Anyhow, see you tonight.

Jack

GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

28 June 1970

Mr. Emerson J. Minnick
R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.

Dear Mr. Minnick:

Please allow me to take this opportunity to extend my congratulations. Dr. Sanders, who heads up our Division of Research and Development, has told me in confidence that your invention represents a breakthrough of the first importance, and one which may well revolutionize the food industry. Our Engineering Section is working day and night to produce a working model which can be demonstrated to eager industrialists all over the country. Due to the unusual form in which the plans were drawn, it has been necessary to engage the services of a consultant engineer to put them

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into conventional shape for patent purposes. This has resulted in a bill for $300.00. I am happy to say that our initial application for a patent has been looked on with favor, and pending an official patent search by our Washington Branch (for which a nominal standard charge of $200.00 is made), there should be no difficulties from that direction.

There is one other small matter. While our Director of Research and Development was able to grasp instantly the genius inherent in your design, it has unfortunately been the case that, with other, less gifted inventors, we have built working models that did not work. It is therefore our unalterable policy to obtain a deposit in advance, against the cost of materials and labor for producing the model. Please realize that this in no way implies any lack of confidence on our part for your invention, but is a necessary measure to protect ourselves against impractical cranks who, unlike yourself, waste our time and money with nonsense. Since your invention shows such obvious potential, I have obtained special dispensation from the firm's Comptroller to reduce this deposit to a minimal amount of $500.00 which, I am sure you will agree, is only reasonable.

As shown on the separate statement, the total of these amounts comes to just one thousand dollars. We hope to obtain your remittance for this amount as soon as possible so that we can forge ahead with the development of your wonderful invention.

Very truly yours,
John Wallen, Pres.

R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.
2 July 1970

Genius Inventions, Inc.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Mr. Wallen:

I am glad for the confidence you have shown in me by devoting so much of your important time to my invention. I told you it was a good one. I am a little surprised it costs so much to build down there, as I built the one here for only forty-five dollars ($45.00) and some parts from an old transistor set, but I guess things are more expensive in L.A. than in Petaluma. I have never been partners in owning a real Patent before and am glad you could work that out OK. I am sending along my money order for One Thousand Dollars Cash ($1,000.00) and this little bottle which is New-Laid Flavor. When the machine is making some eggs, pour in some of this in the hopper and then keep them in your refrigerator for a week and *don't* eat

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them. At the end of that time you will see the difference! Please let me know how things are coming along as I am anxious to start Cashing In.

Yours truly,
Emerson J. Minnick

Dept. 16-L
Richardson Aerospace

Dear Chief Genius:

I hear you got the grand from our champion fall guy. Good work! A few more like him and we could quit these lousy moonlighting jobs and go into it full time . . . advertise in the Mid-Western states and so on. The Mid-West must be stiff with 'em.

My foreman has been getting a bit suspicious, so I haven't been able to get all the parts for the Electronic Chicken. You know, when I got into the schematic, the thing had a kind of wacky logic, so, just for ducks, I'm going to build it just like he put it down. I had a bit of trouble getting the casting for the mold chamber, but a guy over at Light Metals did it for me during lunch hour, so that's that bit settled anyhow. We've taken this guy for so much we'd better build the thing the way he wants it. That way he's got no squawk coming when it doesn't work, right?

Bring a six-pack of beer along tonight and we'll dope it out. I have the circuitry set up on a breadboard layout right now, but I think I'll spray it onto a styrene panel . . . looks more professional and he'll probably figure a printed circuit cost a lot more to produce. See you tonight.

Dick

P.S. I really dig what he said about flavored eggs. Can you feature it? "What'll it be this morning, sir? Pistachio eggs or butter-vanilla eggs?" Yeccch!

GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

6 July 1970

Mr. Emerson J. Minnick
R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.

Dear Mr. Minnick:

We are happy to report that a patent search of the U.S. Government files has revealed no prior application for patent of a Self-Priming Solid-State Electronic Chicken and that we can therefore go ahead with our application for patent.

Our director of Research and Development, Dr. Sanders, has informed me that the working model is all but completed and that his department expects to carry out preliminary testing tomorrow. Since we expect no difficulty from that end of things,

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we are now at the stage of considering marketing procedures.

Our Public Relations and Advertising Departments have come up with a projection of a preliminary campaign, including an official unveiling to which members of the press and leading industrial representatives will be invited. As you will see from the attached cost estimate, this will cost an additional seven hundred dollars. According to our contract, GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC., is not responsible for promotional and advertising costs of untried inventions and we are therefore asking you to remit us this amount as an advance deposit. Our director of Public Relations has advised me to caution you against coming here to attend this ceremony or making it known to the public, except through us, that you are the inventor of the Electronic Chicken. As you are doubtless aware, the world of business is full of unscrupulous elements, and there are Powerful Interests who would not stop at physical intimidation or worse to prevent you from making your invention public. We at GENIUS INVENTIONS feel that it is the least we can do as your partners to protect you from such elements and take these risks for you.

Our Advertising Department has brought out a projected brochure with illustrations and working drawings, and a witty, informative text done by one of the leading men in the field, which we feel would be invaluable in marketing your invention to best advantage. While we hesitate to urge you unduly, we feel that an extra four hundred dollars, which represents the printing and publications costs of this brochure, would be a wise investment. Should you decide in favor of this, copies will be sent to you as soon as they are produced.

Thanking you in advance for your understanding and remittance, I remain,

Very truly yours,
John Wallen, Pres.

GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

9 July 1970

Dick:

I'm leaving this by your place, 'cause you weren't at the lab when I stopped by. It worked smooth as a charm. He never even sent a reply; just a money order which *included* the money for the brochures. Eleven Hundred Simoleans in cool cash. I'm going downtown to cash it before it fades away like fairy gold, and then I'm going to that little printer we used before and have him run off a dozen of those corny brochures and a couple of hoked-up newspaper articles.

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Those should keep him happy for a while. We'd better start looking for a way out, though, pretty soon. Personally, I like the approach we pulled on that woman with the disposable mixing bowls, where we tell the mark we're going to be tied up in government research and our contract doesn't allow us to go ahead with private jobs so we have to pass up his good deal but we'll sell him our half interest real cheap. I figure this guy is maybe good for another grand, especially if we sweeten it with a couple of enthusiastic inquiries from "industrialists" on those phony letterheads we got from the songwriters' racket. Then again, it would maybe be better to cut the risk ('cause he might just get testy) and simply point out to him that his brainstorm doesn't work. Anyhow, think it over and let me know what you think in the morning, 'cause I want to get the letter off to him before he starts wondering where all his money is going.

Jack

Dept. 16-L
Richardson Aerospace
10 July

Jack:

You didn't find me at the lab because I was out getting drunk all day and it's nearly cost me my job. In fact I only just made it in here *this* morning. The honcho's giving me the evil eye, so I'm pretending to do a plan, but I've got to get this to you and I can't talk about it on the phone.

Get this now: Don't, repeat DO NOT sell our rights in that blessed Electronic Chicken 'cause the damn thing really works. I know what you're going to say, Jack, but I did the drinking *after* I found that out, not before. You remember when you left, after we'd had a good laugh about this Minnick guy's screwy plans and all. Well, I decided the hell with it, I'd stay up and finish it, so I did, at about two in the morning. Well, the temptation was too great, I guess, so I poured in all those things where it said to pour them, and turned her on and, by God, if the chamber didn't unmold an egg right on schedule. What's more it kept right on doing it, too, until the raw materials ran out. Over a dozen eggs in a quarter of an hour. I've looked over the drawings and I can see, kind of, how it works, though I still don't quite understand how the calcium-compound sprayer lines the shell mixture into the mold chamber, and I built the damn thing! Anyway, the point is, it *does* work. I had some of the eggs for breakfast this morning and they tasted fine. Not only that, Jack, hell, we could even make square eggs with a different mold chamber. Or eggs as big as

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ostrich eggs, or colored eggs . . . all precolored for Easter. Even those flavored ones he was talking about. Of course the chocolate idea isn't so hot, but what about ready-mixed eggs Benedict right in the shell? The possibilities are endless, man! And the biggest thing is, we can set up a series of these things right here in L.A. in an old garage or something and sell direct to the supermarkets, no transport, no chicken farms to worry about, nothing. And we own half of it!

You remember, we discussed once what we'd do if any of these screwballs actually came up with something. Well now's the time to do it. That's your department, so you'd better get onto it right away. The way I see it, we can do one of two things. Either we try and convince him the idea's no good and try and get him to sell his share to us (though, since it really does work, he must know it does and probably wouldn't go along with it) or else we become industrialists ourselves and buy up the manufacturing rights (our shares *and* his under some phony name) and go into business. You got any idea how many eggs are consumed in the greater L.A. area alone each day, Jack? Well, figure it out at three cents an egg to us, which will way undersell the competition from the regular poultry farmers, and figure a quarter of a cent to produce (that's about right) and multiply that by a production center under our franchise at every major city, and man-oh-man!

Anyhow, get working on him . . . feel him out about selling his share, and if he won't play we'll try the other bit. Hell, we have a half share sewn up legally anyway, so if worst comes to worst we can do it straight and *still* come out on easy street.

Bring a bottle of champagne tonight—hell, bring a case—and we'll have champagne and omelets.

Diamond Dick Sanders

P.S. I'm running off a dozen tonight with that new-laid flavor he sent (it smells like cod liver oil, but I'm in no mood to argue with him any more) and laying them away for a week in the fridge with a couple of control eggs like he said. If these eggs can really taste farm-fresh after cold-storage, we're on to something even bigger than I thought.

GENIUS INVENTIONS, INC.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

10 July 1970

Dick:

You've gotta be kidding. If you're pulling my leg I'm going to clobber you over the head with it. Anyhow, I'm writing no letters to him until I *see* that thing produce

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an egg and eat it myself. I'm leaving this note to say I'll be a little late, 'cause I had a date which I'm putting off, so this had *better* be for real! Assuming that you're not kidding, I don't think it's a good idea to try and buy off the mark, 'cause that would just make him suspicious. I think we'll try the second way, through a dummy company. I've got some letterheads from the "Apex Marketing Corporation" which ought to do. I'll try him on a fairly low bid and let him chisel us up a bit, so he can think he's being shrewd. If this really *is* on the level, we could maybe find an angel and really put in a decent bid. See you tonight, anyway, and if this is all a story I'm going to break that bottle over your head.

Jack

R.F.D. 68
Petaluma, Calif.
14 July 1970

Genius Inventions, Inc.
1448 Bonanza Blvd.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Mr. Wallen:

In receipt of yours of the 11th. I'm glad to hear that you have worked out everything so good and that Big Industry is interested. Like I said, it is sure-fire. You say this Apex company has offered Ten Thousand Dollars for a ten year license, but my half would only come to Five Thousand and I have already spent nearly Three and I guess you have spent a lot too, so I think we should ask them for more or find another buyer. As I had to sell most of my fryers and two acres of land to raise the money, I want to come out with at least ten thousand for myself, so will you please fix that up?

Yes, in reply to your question, I have been selling those eggs here for about six months through the local wholesaler. I guess most of them go to San Francisco.

Hoping to hear from you soon, since I could use the money quickly.

Yours truly,
Emerson J. Minnick

Dept. 16-L
Richardson Aerospace
17 July 1970

Jack:

Something damn funny is going on and I think you'd better come on over to my place tonight. You remember those eggs I added that mixture to? Well, tonight as I was closing the fridge I noticed that the light didn't go out when I closed it. It sounds crazy, but there's this little shiny bit at the back and just as the door is nearly

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closed you can see a reflection and tell when the light goes out—a split second before the door closes. Of course I never really think about it, but I noticed it when it *wasn't* there, you know what I mean? It just clicked with me that the light was staying on.

Well, I opened up the door and pushed the little button back and forth and no matter whether the switch was open or closed it stayed lit. I didn't want to take too long working with the door open like that 'cause all the cold falls out, so I went and got the Wheatstone Bridge from the test bench to see if I could trace a short in the wiring somewhere. Damn if there wasn't a strong electrical field—I should say electro magnetic, really—that had no business being around a fridge. Guess where the field originated? From the eggs, my boy. I know you're thinking I've flipped, but those eggs were and are putting out a field that's keeping that light lit; you come check it yourself. And you haven't heard all of it. I had the sample eggs marked with grease pencil and, of course, the eggs this is coming from are the ones I added the "farm-fresh" liquid to. We should have checked this thing out better, Jack, before we paid that guy all that money. Anyhow, I couldn't resist the temptation, so I took one out, closed the door—to hell with the light—and opened it into a bowl. Jack, it's . . . well, you'd better come see, or I'm going to think I've got the d.t.'s or something. I'll swear this thing was about ready to hatch out and there's like a tiny transmitter that . . . no, you come see, *then* we'll talk. I've got it preserved in a glass of vodka, but it's giving me the creeps. I'll expect you about six.

Yours in utter sobriety,
Dick

Note found crumpled on floor by Nathan Bathurst, building superintendent, while investigating sudden vanishing of tenant from 126-B.

Jack, I'm writing this in snatches when they're not looking I'll try and shove it under the door and if you see it don't come in for Christ's sake Jack don't come in this flat but get the police or somebody right away. They were waiting when I got home and already four of them are hatched out and somehow they opened the door from inside and got out Jack they come from some place where it's dark and cold and the light and cold in the fridge is just right to hatch them so unplug the fridge first Jack please and break or burn all those eggs and Jack they've been controlling Minnick so send someone there and I don't know how many more . . .

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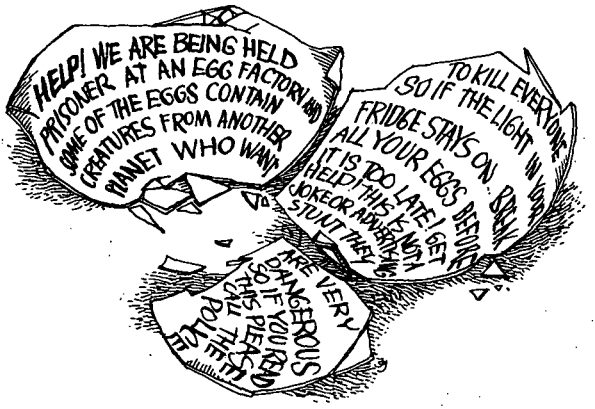
Discovered written on the inside of an eggshell, by Mrs. Cecelie Patterson of 426 La Vista Drive, Los Angeles, Calif., while making a pound cake:


HELP! WE ARE BEING HELD PRISONER AT AN EGG FACTORY AND SOME OF THE EGGS CONTAIN CREATURES FROM ANOTHER PLANET WHO WANT
TO KILL EVERYONE SO IF THE LIGHT IN YOUR FRIDGE STAYS ON WHEN ALL YOUR EGGS BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE! GET HELP! THIS IS NOT A JOKE OR AN ADVERTISING STUNT THEY
ARE VERY DANGEROUS SO IF YOU FIND ONE CALL THE POLICE

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Maureen Exter is 26, lives in California with her two children and husband, who is a great science fiction fan. She's had some stories in Ingenue *and other magazines and writes that "I read whatever science fiction is around, though I skip the scientific parts." Most good sf is primarily about the people that the scientific parts affect, and Mrs. Exter has an alert and interested eye in that direction, as demonstrated by the story below.*

The Good-bye Birthday

by Maureen Bryan Exter

"IT'S TIME TO GET UP, DAVID," his bed whispered, shaking him gently. "It's a fine, clear day, a special day, and you can see all the way to West Dump."

David flopped over on his stomach and put his pillow over his head. The bed shook him again, but he just dug in further, grunting. Ordinarily he would have jumped up right after the weather report, because he was fifteen and had only a few more months of childhood left, but today he was heavy with sleep.

"All right, Sunshines," Mom's voice came harshly over the speaker above his door. "I want to hear you all singing—*loud*."

He remembered and his stomach suddenly hurt. He sat up.

"One — two — three — all together—" Mom counted.

It was Nola's birthday.

"Good-bye to you," he sang, not very loudly, as he walked into the shower. Instantly it turned on, just at the temperature he preferred. "Good-bye to you. Good-bye, dear No-la. Good-bye to you."

The water turned icy cold for an instant, and he was wide-awake. "Next time sing louder, David," Mom said over the speaker.

The water turned off, and his teeth chattered as he dried off in the warm air that followed. If he didn't need to be alert so much, he would have been very angry with Mom.

"I love you, David," Nola had

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said, just yesterday. All of that blonde hair was streaming down her back, and all of those tears were on her cheeks and in her mouth. She was a mess. She was beautiful. "Don't let them take me away, David. They say it's nice, but I don't know what it will be like. I'm afraid, David."

He had kissed her, as he'd always dreamed of doing. This was the first time she even seemed to think of him as anything but a housebrother, and it was the day before her sixteenth birthday. *Now* she wanted to be kept there. *Now* he was supposed to think of something. It was just like a woman to wait until the last minute.

Her lips were so soft. Of course, Mom had shown up just then. "Break it up, kids," she growled at them. "Boys to the east wing after dinner, girls to the west. You know the rules."

"I was just taking something out of Nola's eye," he had explained. "See, she's crying."

Mom examined Nola then, her grey head momentarily covering the girl's blonde one. "I don't see anything."

"Of course not," David said pleasantly. "I got it."

Nola smiled at him then, and he smiled at her, and Mom glowered at them both. "Good night, *children*," she said pointedly.

Nola went west, and he went east, and he was awake for a long, long time.

David took a fresh green smock from the dispenser by the shower, put it over his head, and then slipped into his sandals. He combed his short brown hair and then rubbed his face. He'd just depilated it yesterday, and it was still hairless. He thought about doing it again, just for good measure.

The voice was louder this time. "Hurry it up or I'll send Dad in."

David smiled. Dad would be busy helping the little ones work their snaps, and if he did come in, he would only look sad without saying anything.

"I'm hurrying," he said to the speaker. If Mom were only human, he thought grimly, he'd get her. But Mom was manufactured, just like Dad. Sometimes he forgot that there were really two Moms, both alike with their grey hair and housedresses and print aprons. One was nagging Mom, who did all of the work around the house and the supervising and the prodding, and the other was Rocking Mom in the nursery, who seldom spoke very loudly and who smiled and sang to the babies. David had hardly even seen Rocking Mom for years and years now.

He left the room, and the light turned off behind him.

In the hall Trudy was waiting for him, holding her doll. She was a slight, dark ten-year-old, and the doll was her favorite, a mama doll that she'd gotten on her eighth

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birthday, one that said "baby, my wonderful baby" when you squeezed her. She thrust it at him, the right arm hanging limp. "Can you fix her?" Trudy asked anxiously.

No time, he thought. "Hurry it up, hurry it up," rang from room speakers all up and down the hall. Well, at least he wasn't the only one. He took the doll and examined it. "Doesn't look too serious," he said. He reached inside the doll at the armpit and connected the loose wire. He pressed a button, and the doll waved both arms.

Trudy smiled gloriously. David squeezed the doll. "Baby, my wonderful baby," the doll said.

"I love you, David," Trudy said, not looking at him.

"Anytime," David said, nodding. He started off again to the dining room. "Breakfast," he called back at her.

Trudy just stood there squeezing her doll.

He wouldn't have stopped, except that Trudy was a hard-luck kid and sometimes he felt sorry for her. He knew economics, and he knew why things had to fall apart, but sometimes he wondered why they couldn't at least make dolls that would work for more than a few months without repairs. He could understand the jeeps and the houses and the parks, but some kids really got attached to dolls. Like old Trudy. Her parents hadn't sent her anything for her last birthday. David had tried to tell her that parents didn't really send the birthday gifts—adults didn't live in schools, so there weren't any of them on Earth or any of the other school planets, and it was difficult to keep track of dates when you were somewhere else or in flight, so it was machines that sent the gifts.

It was a darned shame. Trudy wasn't even one of those who thought about birthdays in terms of loot. She thought about getting something from her parents, like that doll, and so of course she was the one the machine had forgotten. It had been her tenth birthday, but Trudy had spent the whole day in the nursery with Rocking Mom.

When David got to the dining room, the other ten were all standing at the table. Nola was across from him, at his end of the table, and he saw that she had dark, sleepless smudges under her eyes like his. She was looking at him in a sort of wild way, not saying anything. He just shook his head and shrugged.

Mom had already put bibs on the little ones. They stood for the flag salute, those of them who knew how to stand, and the youngest baby rhythmically hit the table with his fist until Dad held his hand for him and stared at him sadly. The baby quieted down.

They finished and sat down.

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David saw Trudy slip in to her place, where there was a big mug of chocolate waiting for her. David, Nola, and a fat girl named Darleen had coffee because they were all over twelve.

"Pass the cream, please, David," Nola said. She leaned toward the center of the table. He leaned toward her. "What are you going to do?" she whispered.

"I don't know," he said softly.

"Well, *think* about it, will you?" she snapped.

"Children," Dad said patiently.

He gave her the cream and they both sat back at their places.

After the younger children were settled, Mom and Dad sat down at their respective ends of the table. They remained seated until after everyone had finished.

There was no tension, because everyone knew what the announcement was going to be. Finally, Mom cleared her throat. "You all know that we will be losing Nola today," she said. "You sang her good-bye birthday song this morning, and I'm sure some of you have already said your farewells. The only thing I have to report is that we will have a party this afternoon, with *turkey* (there was a heavy emphasis on this, as though the turkey were real), and—" here Mom paused, "—we will have a special guest."

David saw Nola seem to perk up her ears at that. It was probably a relative. Like all of them, Nola had never met any of her relatives, but the machines usually tried to get someone who was a blood relation to take you away when you were sixteen.

Red-headed John held up his hand. Mom nodded at him. "Can I go play with Ricky if I'm back for the party?" Ricky lived in a house two blocks down with his own Moms and Dad.

"You're twelve now," Mom said. "You can do whatever you like."

Trudy held up her hand. "Can I go to see Greta if I'm back—"

Mom shook her head. Greta lived next door, and the rumor was that she was one of those wild ones, or that there was something not quite right with her. Of course, she would be Trudy's closest friend. "You stay here with me," Mom said. "Help me pour the turkey into the mold."

David had seen Mom in action when she didn't know she was being watched. You couldn't even see where her hands were, she moved so fast. She didn't need Trudy's help.

They were excused from the table. "I'm going to go to my room and think," David whispered to Nola, bumping into her as if by accident.

"Think fast," she whispered back.

He watched her walk out of the room with Doreen, her slim figure hidden in the green smock that

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was like his. "I'll be in my room studying," he said to Dad. David was one of the few over twelve who still studied anything, so he knew that wouldn't look suspicious.

"You're a good boy, David," Dad said gently.

Back in his room David turned on the teacher and waited for the screen to light up. He flipped the dial to see what was on.

"Welcome," the tall Negro said. David heard a rustling of papers. "The ancient Greeks believed that the sun and the planets revolved—"

He turned the dial. "Welcome," a grey-haired woman said. He recognized her immediately as the mathematics teacher. By now he knew as much as she did. He turned the dial again.

It was another woman, this one with wavy brown hair. "West Dump began in the year 2035, almost twenty years after the great earthquake involving the San Andreas fault in the old State of California. Although the population of the United States was greatly decreased by the earthquake, there were problems of *over*population at that time with accompanying problems of housing, and the general consensus of opinion was that although the United States could live without the people who were lost, the land was needed. In addition, a problem of garbage disposal had reached crisis proportions. It was J. Pierce Krause who first suggested that the two problems be combined and that the accumulated garbage, processed, and the garbage which would be created in the future, be used for fill—"

"2035," David wrote down. "J. Pierce Krause."

The teacher continued, "The Great Plague was of course unexpected, even by those who started it, and the survivors who remained on Earth went inland, still producing massive amounts of garbage, which was in turn processed and moved to the dead West. West Dump itself grew north along the coast, and then, as the remaining population left, inland until the present boundaries were established just past the Rocky Mountains, or what were the Rocky Mountains.

"Since the Earth was brought under private ownership, garbage has still remained a problem, although it is now only produced by the present young inhabitants and occasional visitors, and so East Dump has recently been started—"

The lights flashed: TEST—TEST—TEST.

The woman looked sterner now and even older. "In what year was the great earthquake involving the San Andreas fault?"

"Around 2015," David said.

She cleared her throat. "All right. Who suggested—"

"J. Pierce Krause," he said.

She smiled at him broadly. She

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would have been pretty if she wasn't so old. He figured she was probably near thirty. "You're great," she said. "You really are."

"Thanks," he said. He turned off the set. She looked sort of disappointed, but he'd thought of something.

They'd camp. You could camp forever in Chicago, if you liked Chicago that much. He'd only done it once, but the facilities weren't bad at all. The hotels were all marked if they were fit for residence, and they even had signs up indicating which houses you could burn, although David suspected most of them were built overnight. Everything worked, and there was a little hospital tucked away where you couldn't see it if you didn't know it was there. The only thing he didn't care for was that it was so crowded, especially in the summer, so that it was hard to find a place to park, and also the beds weren't the type that changed themselves. But still, you could live there if you tried. David had been saving up his allowance so that he had enough batteries to drive his jeep to New York before it was filled up, so they wouldn't have any problems that way. It would be just he and Nola, driving away and camping out, and her blonde head on his shoulder and all of the gratitude for saving her.

At lunch he managed to get Nola behind a door and kiss her quickly while Mom was out of the room. "I'm so afraid, David," she said, but her eyes were shining. Then, "Who do you think it will be?"

"I've thought of something," he said, frowning, "unless you don't want to."

"I do," she said, and he thought she was going to cry again. "Don't you believe me? It's just that I'm curious and scared and everything's happening all at once." She became more composed. "What's your idea?"

"We'll camp." He saw the eagerness drain from her eyes. "It's really not bad at all. It's very comfortable, in fact."

"Camping?" she said. "But it's so—primitive."

"That's just temporary," he said. "Until we find something else. I've heard there are places —" He didn't tell her about turning on the radio he found in the museum in Chicago. There were places, all right. The only problem was getting to them. "There are other people like us—there must be." He took her hand. "Don't you trust me?"

She squeezed his hand so that her nails hurt him. "Oh, yes." The way she was looking at him made his throat hurt.

"Then meet me," he said. "Four o'clock. At the jeep. Bring some permanent clothing—and food tablets, if you can get them, although I have a good supply."

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"Excuse me," Dad said, coming up to them. He took Nola's hand and led her away. Nola gave David one last look, and he felt as though she'd follow him through Europe if he asked her.

Dad took Nola into the dining room, where the turkey was on the table. David had seen a real turkey before in a zoo, in the section where they kept the chickens, so he knew this was somewhat larger than a turkey could reasonably be expected to be. Nevertheless, flexibility of size helped when you had guests.

A woman with short blonde hair the same shade as Nola's was seated at the table, wearing a short, gold-metallic smock. When Nola came in, she stood up. "Oh, Nola," she said, and her voice was deep and throaty. "I'm your mother."

Nola just stood there. "Hello," she finally said, in a funny, high-pitched voice.

"Oh, you're so pretty," the woman said. "Come sit next to me." David assumed that she meant Nola should sit on her left side, because there was a man David thought was at least twenty sitting on her right side.

"I swear, I'd never want to have children of my own," Mom was grumbling. "Children are a nuisance. I don't know why anyone would want to have children around." Mom was always saying that around the girls, and David assumed it was part of their training. After all, Mom couldn't have children. There were some things that you couldn't build in.

Nola's mother was talking more than anyone David had ever heard except for the teacher. "No," she was saying, "your father couldn't be here. He's on his honeymoon. But you'll meet him soon enough. Quite soon enough. A very sentimental man. Why, he was the one who wanted to send you here instead of somewhere more—well, never mind."

Nola said something, and the older woman turned to the young man at her side. "This? Why, this is Raoul. He was on the ship. Raoul, this is my little girl. You see? Raoul didn't believe that I had a daughter old enough to be coming out, and so he insisted on coming to see—and I thought, well, it isn't too soon for my girl to meet a nice young man."

Your little girl is already taken, David thought grimly. He looked over at Nola, raising an eyebrow at her. She winked and shrugged at him, and he felt better.

Nola's mother went on, gesturing expansively, her gold-plated fingernails glittering in the light. "What do you *really* do out there? What do you do? Why, what does anyone do? What do you do here? You play games, you are entertained, you have a baby or more babies if you want to, although of course that doesn't keep you busy

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every minute of the day, especially after they're six months old and you send them to school. You fall in love, you dance, you play games." She paused. "Later you're punished and you work for a while, but that's very brief." She made a face. "Then you die, very softly, very sweetly, without pain of any sort. After all, you can't go on being entertained forever." A sigh. "Oh, Nola, you have so much to look forward to."

David thought he would vomit if he didn't leave pretty soon. He'd never heard anyone who made adulthood sound more dull. It didn't have anything to do with what he'd been taught by the teacher, or what he'd found out for himself, or what he did with his hands.

Nola looked interested, and he figured that was fine. It would keep her entertained until he got the jeep ready.

It was a good old jeep, a stripped-down model with just twelve seats and the rest open space. No frills, no fringes. He'd gotten it on his twelfth birthday, like all the other guys, and he had spent a lot of time tinkering with it. Something was always breaking down. Sometimes he thought that he met everybody he knew while he was out in the street trying to fix it.

The parts wore out so fast that he had started to make his own in the machine shop. It was fun playing with the thing for the first year or so, but then he only had a little time left, and he had decided that he'd rather see what was around and not just a bunch of clockworks. It was a good piece of machinery now. It would probably take him to Seattle, if he could get across West Dump.

Now there was a dream. Go across West Dump. Are you kidding? There's *snow* on West Dump all year around, and it's getting higher all the time.

He'd broached the subject with a group of the guys when they were all trying to fix their wagons together, and even Jordan had laughed. Jordan had been David's best friend before he turned sixteen, and once he had run away for a week, just camping out in the wilderness near the foot of West Dump and shooting cats for food. Nobody had been sent out to get him, but he came back anyway, looking tired. He didn't even try to find a way over. When David asked him why he came back, all he said was that "you can get tired of rubbing garbage together every time you want to cook a cat. Anyway, you go fonky out there with no one to talk to." But Jordan and the others didn't know what David knew.

David had gone into that museum in Chicago, the one with the old machines. Somebody had left the case to the radio open, the one

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that was all steel, and he took it to his room, even though it was pretty heavy. He was going to bring it back, but he didn't want to return home too soon, and he was lonely, and Chicago didn't seem any better than anywhere else he'd touristed. He didn't have the tools to take the thing apart as he'd wanted to do, so he just gave up and fooled around with the controls.

Then he'd gotten something, and it startled him so much he'd jumped a couple of feet straight up. "And there we go and there we are," the man's voice was saying. "That was the nightingale herself, the good, the glorious, the queenly, my wife—"

David heard a woman's voice faintly. "John, will you please—"

"No, no, no, dear. Don't be modest. That was sensational, dear. No, to all of you one hundred and twenty-one—correction, that is, one hundred and twenty-two—little Neill Parker was born last night at 1:22 a.m. with all of his fingers and toes—let's hear it for Neill—"

David could hear the woman laughing, and then the man laughed. "To all of you one hundred and twenty-two glorious people in glorious Seattle on this glorious day, let me say that Joe Parker and I have had one big celebration."

"Amen," the woman's voice said.

David listened that day until the sound stopped. He heard some jokes he had never heard before and that he wasn't even sure he understood.

He tried to get them again, and caught the very end of a broadcast once, which sounded like a two-year-old trying to talk and only lasted for a few minutes. After about a week he put the radio back, shut up the case, and went home.

He would ease Nola into going across West Dump, he decided. People had left before, he knew. Nobody ever went after you, so it was assumed that they had gotten into trouble without being able to summon help. West Dump was considered to be impenetrable, but he knew, or thought he knew, that it could be done. The only problem was to find a way, and he had some theories, and there were batteries enough to experiment around for a while.

Nola wouldn't like the idea, but she'd go all right. She loved him, and they'd make a home together, and she'd be nice and soft, not at all like Mom. Nola's voice caressed him—it didn't scrub the hide off of his back.

He packed as little as he could so that Nola could bring whatever would make her happy. He just took the food tablets, and the doctor, and some other supplies.

Trudy had come out to watch him for a while, sitting in the jeep

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while he packed, and he didn't mind the company. He would miss her because she was a bad-luck child and no one would look out after her when he was gone. Besides that, she didn't talk much.

"What are you doing?" she finally asked.

"Packing," he answered.

"Going on a trip?" Her brown eyes were shining, as they always did when she talked to him.

"You could say that."

"Can I go with you?" She looked serious.

He stopped loading things in. "Sorry, Trudy," he said, patting her on the shoulder. "Not this time."

"I'll be good," she said.

"Sorry, Trudy."

"Nola's too old to go with you," she said. "She's sixteen now. She's all grown up."

He looked surprised. "Who said anything about Nola?"

"Nobody." She let herself out of the other side of the jeep and slammed the door. "But she won't go with you." She ran back into the house.

David finished up the packing and made sure that everything was secure and that the parts were all in good order. He began to feel an excitement he hadn't felt before, and a tiredness at the same time. There was still about an hour to go before Nola met him there, so he went to the back to see if he could catch a nap.

It was dark when he awoke, and Nola still wasn't there. As soon as he was fully awake, he got out of the jeep. The cool night air hit his skin, only lightly covered by the thin smock, and he realized he was sweating.

Dad was in the front passageway, having already started his nightly pacing for those who were still out.

"Where's Nola?" David demanded. He would kill himself, he thought grimly. No, he would kill them if they'd taken Nola by force, kill them slowly and diabolically if they'd hurt her.

"She's in the parlor with Raoul," Dad said quietly. "They'll all be leaving in the morning."

David's heart beat in his ears as he ran to the parlor.

Nola was there sitting on the couch with Raoul. Her long hair was piled up in a coil on her head, and she was wearing a short, close-fitting smock of some silverish material. She and Raoul were both holding glasses.

"Nola?" David said, as if to a stranger.

Nola started. "Oh, David—" She blushed. David had never seen her blush before. It made her more beautiful and less Nola-like. "This is Raoul," she said. "He's a friend of mother's." She turned to the handsome young man. "This is David," she said with a sudden hard voice. "He's one of the children here."

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David turned and left the room, and it wasn't until he reached the coziness of his jeep that he cried. He cried, not just for Nola, but for everything, for not having enough sleep the night before, for sleeping too long that afternoon, for being disappointed in Chicago, for not seeing Boston before it was moved to Lake Michigan and made a national monument, and for the adult he was going to be in a few months. He cried most of all for the adult he was going to be.

"I'm sorry, David," Trudy said, touching his shoulder gently. He hadn't noticed her at all.

"You've been here all the time?"

She nodded. "I thought it might embarrass you. I knew about Nola. I knew she wouldn't go with you. She was just scared because she didn't know it would be all right."

David wiped his eyes on his arm. "I was just to be there in case it didn't look good, right?"

"I'm sorry, David," Trudy repeated.

He got out a tissue and blew his nose. It was comforting in a way to have her there. He looked at her. Trudy had tears dropping off her cheeks. "Hey, did your mama doll break again?" She shook her head. "Then what's the matter?"

"I love you, David," Trudy said.

"You're just a kid," he said bitterly.

"I won't always be," she said matter-of-factly. "Anyway, I'll go with you."

"I won't be back," David said.

"That's all right." Trudy took out another tissue and wiped his eyes. "They won't let me play with Greta any more."

David thought about what Jordan had said, about how you can go crazy out in the wilderness without someone to talk to. He shrugged. "If you change your mind, we can always call someone to come get you."

"I won't go back. Not ever." She picked up something from the front of the jeep, and David saw that she had her mama doll with her. She squeezed it.

"Baby," the doll said. "Beautiful, dear baby."

David started the jeep.

As they left, he could see Dad, pacing sadly, in the passageway.

FASHION NOTE:

When nuclear dust has extinguished their betters,
Will the turtles surviving wear people-neck sweaters?

From Rhymes for the Irreverent *by E. Y. Harburg, by permission of Grossman Publishers, Inc.*

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This latest story is one of Ron Goulart's funniest. It is about mechanical dogs, Woodstock, an airborne house called Blackhawk Manor, Military Pills, Spiro Agnew, naked bicycling, and a giant, shaggy Commando Killer, among many other things.

CONFESSIONS

by Ron Goulart

THE STUBBY MAN POUNDED HIS fist on the patio table. He then looked hopefully across at Jose Silvera. "That's about how I've been doing it."

"Basically," said the tall, wide-shouldered Silvera, "your table pounding is okay."

Hugo Kohinoor brought his still-fisted hand up and rubbed his outspread stomach. "Not a great table thump, though, is it, Joe?"

Silvera studied the clear blue afternoon sky. He stroked his chin with the chill rim of his ale mug. "When I suggested you had a problem, I meant not with *how* you pound the table but *when*. The point being that the fault isn't really in those speeches I wrote for you."

A waiter in a white flannel surcoat came trotting over. "You don't have to hammer on your table, I was coming."

"We don't want you," Kohinoor told him. "I was only practicing."

The waiter bent and scrutinized the pudgy man. "Ah," he said. "You're Hugo Kohinoor, head of the Cultural Surveillance Agency for our entire planet of Murdstone." From a flap pocket of his surcoat he took a pair of lemon-yellow spectacles and clamped them on. "You don't look as squabbish in person as you do on the lecture platform."

"Thank you," said the CSA head.

"Another ale," mentioned Silvera. Rose-tinted gulls were spiraling down through the sky to skim the calm waters of the bay.

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"I must tell you, Mr. Kohinoor," continued the waiter, "I was deeply moved by your recent speech at our Melazo Territory Citizens Club. Usually I don't pay much attention to a squatty man. You, however, have something to say and you say it well."

"How about when I pounded my fist on the lectern. Was that attention-getting?"

"It was the day I heard you," replied the waiter, "because you knocked over the water carafe." He bowed. "I'll fetch your order now. One ale? Good. Keep up your fine work, Mr. Kohinoor."

Kohinoor smiled at Silvera. "He seemed sincere in his appreciation."

"The speeches are fine," said Silvera. "So pay me the rest of the money."

Kohinoor said, "At first I thought $1500 for only three speeches attacking the . . . what was it you called them?"

"Lords of the press. You still owe me $750."

"Freedom of the press is a flaming sword. That's how it goes, right? Freedom of the press is a flaming sword, and I am here to tell you that the lords of the press have turned that sword into a lawnmower which is nipping in the bud the free flow of thought. Yes, that's nicely put."

Silvera nodded and picked up the fresh ale the waiter had brought. "When you recited it just now, you hit the table on *here* and *lawnmower.*"

"Not effective?"

Silvera said, "On *flaming sword* you ought to wave your hand in the air. Then after *free flow* you let it fall with a thud and smash into the table. You'll get applause."

"They have been applauding on lawnmower and I was wondering why," admitted Kohinoor. "Traveling around the planet a lot you sometimes get confused. Melazo Territory is mostly resort country and there's nothing like a lawnmower industry here. Now I understand."

"Cash if you have it."

Kohinoor reached into his knickers and pulled out his wallet. "I'm sorry I criticized the speeches, Joe. Actually you did a fine job. Is one 50 and seven 100s okay?"

"Yes." Silvera took the cash, folded his hand over it. He was reaching for his own wallet when a three-story wooden house flew over. He jumped up and ran to the marble rail of the resort hotel patio. The black house was flying over at about two thousand feet. Silvera shook his head and returned to the statesman's table. "Those bastards," he said, sitting again.

"Who? The Blackhawk Group."

"Yes. You know them?"

"I'm a close friend of Professor Burton Prester-Johns," said Kohinoor. "McLew Scribbeley, who, as

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I understand, is the legal owner of Blackhawk Manor, I've had a few conflicts with. Because of that Scribbeley Press of his. Basically, though, I'm fond of all the writers in the Blackhawk Group."

Silvera said, "McLew Scribbeley owes me $2000."

"I thought it was part of your code as a freelance writer, Joe, to always collect your fees."

"I do," said Silvera, "usually. These Blackhawk people keep moving their house."

"A delightful novelty, I think. Flying mobile homes. I'd like to settle down like that someday."

"I've tracked McLew Scribbeley to three different territories on Murdstone so far," said Silvera.

"Did you write something for that vile Scribbeley Press of his?"

"Yes, three confessions," said Silvera. "I did *Confessions of a Robust Man, My Disgusting Sex Life* and *I, a Rascal.*"

Kohinoor blinked his little blue eyes. "You mean you're A Man Of High Station, Dr. X, and Anonymous? I had them down in my Cultural Surveillance files as three separate authors."

"I can write in different styles."

"That one, that *My Disgusting Sex Life,*" said Kohinoor. "I found it to be . . . disgusting."

Silvera asked, "Do you know where he's going to land that damn house this time?"

"Yes, on Post Road Hill," said Kohinoor. "As a matter of fact, I'm invited there to dinner tonight."

Silvera frowned. "I'll come along."

Two hundred bicycles came clattering down over the crest of the hill, each ridden by a shouting adolescent. Silvera caught the squat Kohinoor by the fur collar of his formal doublet and hauled him back against their just-landed cruiser. Even so, a passing handlebar whacked the surveillance chief in the elbow.

"Long live Prester-Johns!" cried the cycling youths as they rattled by Blackhawk Manor and on downhill.

Kohinoor said, "Cyclemania has caught up the youth of Murdstone."

"Yes, I saw your friend Prester-Johns talking about it on television last night."

"Old P-J relates to youth in ways some of us can't, and he's nearly sixty," said Kohinoor. "Of course, he's a tall man. It's easier to radiate charisma when you've got height."

After the last cyclist had passed, Silvera and Kohinoor crossed the wide dirt roadway and walked to the iron gate that stood at the edge of the wooded acres the Blackhawk mansion now occupied. A frail man in an ironmonger's tunic peered up over a hedge. "Don't use the gate yet, gentlemen."

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"Why?"

"It's not screwed to the fence," explained the workman. "I only now got the thing uncrated. See, one of the delays was the box with the razor-sharp fence spikes got misplaced. What is more, the nitwit movers threw out the ground glass I'm supposed to sprinkle atop the stone wall out back. See, they opened the box and saw all that broken glass and felt responsible. So they ditched the glass, box and all. Well, come around through here."

"Thank you," said the stubby Kohinoor.

Silvera helped him get over the hedges onto the path.

"Oh, sirs," called the ironmonger as they started up the winding gravel pathway to the house. "You're the final guests of the evening. So you can tell them to turn on the watch dogs in another fifteen minutes. I'll be finished by then."

"Scribbeley and P-J have a dozen robot hounds," said Kohinoor.

"I've encountered them," said Silvera.

"Did you notice that some of those young girls on the bicycles weren't wearing much, Joe?"

"A few of them were naked."

"Should I be for or against that, I wonder," reflected the stumpy man. "The kids are holding their big annual Bike-in some three miles from here all this week. Perhaps I should issue a position paper. You could write one up for me. Do you know anything about naked bicycle-riding?"

"I've done it." They climbed up the red stone steps of the dark wood mansion.

"Oh, really? I guess when you freelance you have more spare time for fooling around." Kohinoor used the golden hawk's-head knocker on the door.

The butler was pale, dressed in shades of grey. "Good evening, Mr. Kohinoor." He glanced then at Silvera. "Yipes." He backed and ran off along the flowered hall carpeting.

"I've encountered him before, too." Silvera walked into the house.

In a huge oak-paneled room at the hall's end were gathered several people. The butler had not gone there, but up a curving staircase to the second floor. In the paneled room a piano stopped playing and then a muscular man in a tweed oversuit leaped out into the hall. He had an upthrust jaw, square teeth and shaggy blond hair. "Well, well, Kohinoor, you old bastard. Was it you spooked Dwiggins?"

"No, Henry." He pointed a thumb at Silvera. "This is my friend, Jose Silvera. The sight of him startled poor Dwiggins."

"Silvera, Silvera," said the tweedy man. "You write, don't you?"

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"That's right, Dobbs."

Henry Verner Dobbs nodded, his chin bobbed. "Know me, know me, do you? Or more likely my work. I'm Henry Verner Dobbs, the author. My specialty is deluxe war books. You probably encountered my photo on the back of my latest hit, *The Coffee Table Book of Hand Grenades*. Big mother of a book, weighs eleven pounds. We, my publishers and I, had it printed on the planet Tarragon by zombies. Those little zombie bastards do lovely color plates, and cheap."

Silvera circled around Dobbs and went into the living room. Scribbeley, the publisher who owed him $2000, wasn't there. Seated at the grand piano was a lovely girl of twenty-six, a tall, coltish brunette with deeply tanned skin and a slight feverish flush.

"Why, it's Jose Silvera," said this lovely girl now. Her voice had a gentle throaty sound. "I've been an admirer of yours since I was a convent girl."

"You've read the fellow's work?" asked the thin, white-haired man standing near the piano.

"I've never read his books, no," said the girl. "I never read other writers. But I saw a picture of Mr. Silvera on a book jacket and I swiped the book. Clipped the photo and kept it pasted inside the cover of my breviary. A good many authors are so unauspicious looking. Mr. Silvera is, on the other hand, big and cute. I am Willa de Aragon, Mr. Silvera." She left the tufted piano bench and came over to him. She touched his hand with her very warm fingers, smiling.

"Do you have a fever?" asked Silvera.

"No, I'm naturally very intense and it seems to heat my body up," she answered. "What brings you to Blackhawk Manor, Mr. Silvera? My invitation didn't mention you."

"Aren't you the fellow?" asked the thin old man.

Kohinoor came hurrying over. "This is Jose Silvera, P-J. Joe, this is Burton Prester-Johns, one of our leading philosophers."

"Aren't you the fellow who threw Dwiggins out of the greenhouse?"

"Into," said Silvera.

"Whichever direction, it played havoc with the glass panels. We had to abandon the greenhouse, in fact. It's gounded, won't fly. Yes, you're that fellow."

"Joe is a very talented and affable person." Kohinoor reached over and pounded on the piano top. "I brought him along tonight, P-J, so he and McLew Scribbeley can settle their differences for good and all."

"Kind of fellow who throws butlers through greenhouse walls," said Prester-Johns. "Not the kind of fellow one can trust. Yes, it's no

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small wonder our young people have more faith in bicycles than in their elders." He rubbed a sharp forefinger in the opposite palm. "As I summed up the situation in *Bikocracy,* the responsibility for . . ."

"Shall I give, shall I give him the heave-ho?" Dobbs had leaped back into the room.

"Well, he isn't the kind of fellow one wants to get cozy with."

Kohinoor hit the piano again. "You have to be less suspicious, P-J. Just because the Commando Killer is still loose, you don't have to be so cautious."

Prester-Johns inhaled so deeply he tipped over slightly. He touched his lined cheek with one thin hand.

Dobbs said, "Uh."

Her breath warm, Willa whispered to Silvera, "They have a rule never to talk about the Commando Killer within these walls."

"Why?"

"Apparently, Mr. Silvera, this fiend who has been roaming Murdstone for nearly a year now, claiming a score of victims," said the warm girl. "Apparently this fiend has struck several times in the vicinity of Blackhawk Manor. If you are aware how mobile Blackhawk is, you'll know this involved several separate vicinities."

Through the arched entranceway came a fat man in a white suit. He had a bristling red moustache and a ribbed bald head. "Throw out that wop," he said, pointing at Silvera. "Hello, wop." He chuckled. "Only kidding, Joe. Who cares if you're a dago." He came closer to Silvera. "The throw-you-out-on-your-keaster part is true. Dwiggins just went to get a couple of my hunky retainers. Just kidding. I don't hold their race against them." He shot out his hand suddenly and pinched Willa's left buttock. "Hi, there, you sex-crazed little wench. Just kidding, Willa."

Silvera noticed Scribbeley's suit was one that had the currently fashionable lapels. He grabbed these and wrenched the publisher up off the floor. "$2000."

"Joe, what did I tell your agent, that sweet little Jenny Jennings?"

"Nothing. You pinched her ankle and that was it."

"I was aiming for her left buttock," said the fat publisher. "Look, Joe, I confess I have a compulsive desire to pinch girls. I swear to you that is my only fault. I told your agent and now I tell you, I never got paid by my distributor. Take that one title you did. *My Disgusting Sex Life.* We got a lot of negative mail from people saying it wasn't disgusting. Incidents like that can make people lose faith in Scribbeley Press."

"$2000," repeated Silvera, dropping Scribbeley.

"I could let you have eighty-six thousand unbound copies of *I, a*

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Rascal, Joe. You could maybe bind them in a nice, sensual cloth and make a fortune selling them mail order."

"Cash, now," said Silvera. Then something came down and hit his head. It hit him hard and several times and he fell down.

Silvera awoke in midair. He hit on his side in among piles of fresh-cut shrub, some hundred yards from Blackhawk Manor. He saw, by squinting through the branches and leaves his head was lodged among, three of Scribbeley's henchmen strutting back toward the turreted mansion.

Extracting his left arm from thorned branches, Silvera knifed his hand in alongside his stuck head and got the thorns away from his cheek. He gave a grunt and pulled back and out free. He stood up and a black dog bounded over and bit him in the leg. Its teeth were stainless steel and penetrated quite deep. Silvera took a small tool kit out of an inside pocket, and recalling a diagram he'd consulted at the Melazo Territory Free Library that afternoon, he deactivated and then dismantled the mechanical dog.

He dropped the dog components in with the shrub and brush that had been cleared away to make landing room for the mansion. Silvera nodded, looked at the newly arrived moon, stepped into the pine woods that surrounded the mansion site. He worked his way quietly back toward the house, favoring his injured leg.

Silvera worked slowly through the woods and emerged at the rear of the mansion. Through the lighted windows of the kitchen, he saw a robot pastry chef filling cream puffs. Crouched low, Silvera approached the twenty wooden steps leading up to the pantry door.

Three more mechanical dogs came around a black edge of the house. They didn't bark, giving out instead a beeping siren sound. One of them had eyes that flashed a bile yellow.

Silvera ran. They pursued him twice around a sundial and once through the still-empty fishpond.

"Do come in, Mr. Silvera," called a sweet voice from a quickly opened door below the pantry stairs.

He obliged. Silvera ducked through the storeroom doorway, and Willa de Aragon slammed the thick door against the vinyl muzzle of the yellow-eyed hound. "Thanks," said Silvera.

The slim, glowing girl held her hand torch toward his injured leg. "You've sustained a wound, Mr. Silvera. You're lucky they haven't had time to unpack the rabies and other poisons for the fangs."

"You were coming out to look for me?"

"I was concerned and I thought

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I might be able to help out. I believe your friend, Mr. Kohinoor, was talking about going to bring you back, but he hasn't as yet." She touched one warm hand to his cheek. "Whenever I'm a house-guest at Blackhawk Manor, I insist on a room with a secret passage." She gracefully crossed the musty room and pointed at a slid-open portion of the raw wood wall. "By going up a little narrow stairway you're in my bed-chamber. There's an adjoining bath and I'll be able to minister to your wounds."

"Okay," said Silvera. The girl smiled and stepped into the dark hole. He followed, asking, "Won't they miss you?"

"I can join them for dinner later perhaps," said the warm girl.

Her bedroom was large, with flocked rosebuds on the walls and a pastoral scene painted on the slightly domed ceiling. There were thick rugs, thick tapestries, thick draperies, and a huge hand-carved bed. A six-prong candelabra stood on a marble table near the bed.

As Silvera stepped out of the wall, he heard an odd clattering down on the grounds. He pulled aside a wine-colored drape at the nearest window and looked out. A tall young man was walking a bicycle into the pine woods. A moment later, without the cycle, he came walking by the sundial and then was out of sight. The dogs didn't bother him.

"Would you mind taking off your pants?" asked Willa. "Before I turned to authorship I worked as a practical nurse in a satellite gambling-hell orbiting Tarragon. I can treat your injuries quite professionally, you'll find, Mr. Silvera."

He left the window and moved toward the pale-blue bathroom that the lovely girl was stepping into. He stopped at the threshold, unseamed his trousers, and after getting out of his boots, dropped the trousers. "What sort of writing do you do, Willa?"

She nudged a knee-high white wicker hamper toward him. "Sit on that," she said. "Well, Mr. Silvera, there is a genre of novels which is quite popular here on Murdstone at the moment. They're known as Gothics, though I'm not sure why. All about sensitive young girls who are put upon by strange dark men in sinister old houses in out of the way places."

"Yes, I wrote a dozen of them when there was a Gothic craze on Barnum five years ago," he said, sitting. The mechanical dog bite didn't look too bad.

"Under your own name?" She cleansed the wound.

"No, I was," said Silvera, remembering, "Anna Mary Windmiller."

Willa stopped applying a bandage. "My goodness, Mr. Silvera. You don't mean to tell me you are Anna Mary Windmiller?"

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"A dozen times I was anyway," he said. "They were paying $1500 per book."

"You've been an inspiration to me, those books have been. Why, I carry tattered, much-read copies with me still," said Willa. "I am particularly fond of *The Crumbling Chateau on Grave Spawn Hill*. Though, *Return to the Crumbling Chateau on Grave Spawn Hill* is nearly as moving. The opening lines of the former, I think, are excellent and exemplary. 'I confess a sense of dark chagrin flowed through my young, recently graduated from a quiet girls' school, frame when I first opened the door of that crumbling house and tripped over the lifeless body of the local vicar.' A brilliant piece of writing, I think. Oh, I only wish I could write my own Gothics half as well." She finished the bandage and stepped back. "Are you violently anxious to rush down and collect your money?"

"Not violently. Eventually I'm going to get the $2000 from Scribbeley, though. Why?"

"It seems a shame, since you already have your trousers off, not to go to bed together, don't you think?"

Silvera rose from the wicker hamper. "You're pretty aggressive for a writer of polite ladies' fiction."

"Yes," admitted Willa, "and I fear it shows in my work at times."

Silvera smiled, picked her up off the blue tiles and carried her into the bedroom.

It wasn't until the next morning that Silvera left Willa. When he tried to get downstairs by way of the hall, he was stopped by a uniformed police captain.

The policeman, who'd appeared around a turn in the broad, curved stairway, said, "You might as well join the suspects, sir. Do you happen to know where Miss de Aragon is at the moment?"

"Putting on her shoes," said Silvera. "Suspects for what?"

"The murder, sir," said the man in the sea-green uniform. "The inspector is waiting in the living room. Don't try to escape, by the way, as there are vicious dogs outside."

"I know about the dogs."

"Not those robot mutts. We brought our own."

Silvera shrugged his broad shoulders slightly and descended. As he stepped into the living room, McLew Scribbeley called out, "Hello, killer."

Silvera stopped beside a marble statue of a fawn.

"The man who jumps to conclusions often lands on unfirm ground," said a round-headed man in a plaid greatcoat.

"Just kidding," said Scribbeley.

"I am Inspector Ludd," said the round-headed man. "I would like to know who you are."

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"He's the fellow who brought the victim," put in Prester-Johns, who was dressed in a paisley lounging robe this morning.

"I'm Jose Silvera. Kohinoor's beeen killed?"

"Death is like a loose shingle," said the inspector, "that falls on whoever is passing beneath. Yes, Hugo Kohinoor is dead, the victim, so it appears, of the Commando Killer." He had a sliding walk and he made a sort of skating motion approaching Silvera. "Sometimes memory is like a garbage truck with some valuable object thrown away by mistake and lost among coffee grounds and watermelon rinds. Forgive me for not recognizing you sooner, Silvera."

"Since we've never met, it's okay."

"You are the same Jose Silvera who has done such excellent articles for the *Interplanetary Real Crime* magazine?"

"I did a series on pattern killers for them once, yes."

"Modesty here is of no more use than a bunch of bananas in a lion's den," said Inspector Ludd. "I'll appreciate your help on this investigation, Silvera."

Dobbs leaped in, eating a square waffle. "He's probably the murderer. I doubt he'll be much help," said the war book author.

"Please accompany me to the site of the crime, Silvera," suggested the inspector. "I'll continue this series of interviews later."

"I have an autographing party at a book shop this noon," said Dobbs. "They're going to unload a hundred remaindered copies of my *Picture History of Poison Gas.*"

"Murder, though he often arrives late, takes the best seat in the house," said Inspector Ludd with a half-round smile.

"What does that mean?"

"It means, Mr. Dobbs, no one can leave Blackhawk Manor until this investigation has been concluded," said the inspector. To Scribbeley he added, "It means, too, the scene of the crime cannot leave either. Don't go flying off in this mobile home of yours."

"We're renting this location for a month," said Prester-Johns. "I'm to lecture at the Bike-in all this week, and then I'll be doing a little tramp-cycling act for the young people on the weekend."

"Perhaps," said the Inspector. He led Silvera outside.

Standing on the fresh earth at the edge of the woods, Inspector Ludd said, "You can see why this murderer has earned the name of Commando Killer, Silvera. Notice the use of the bayonet, plus the garrote. There are several other little military touches as well. You were here all night, Silvera?"

"Yes. When was Kohinoor killed?"

"Probably between three AM and dawn," said Ludd. "Did you notice anything unusual?"

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"I must have slept through the murder." Silvera knelt down beside the body of Kohinoor. "Little scrap of paper between his thumb and forefinger."

"Yes, it is the corner of a $100 Murdstone currency bill. We are hopeful of finding the rest of it."

"What do they say in the house?" Silvera got to his feet.

"Kohinoor stayed to dinner, though angry because you'd been roughly handled," said the round-headed inspector. "Most everyone retired at midnight or thereabouts. No one admits to being out here at all. Kohinoor was not supposed to have stayed overnight. One of the men coming to finish the new greenhouse found his body here before breakfast. You spent the night with Miss de Aragon?"

"Yes."

"I deduced as much from her reported absence at dinner last evening and from what I've heard of you," said Inspector Ludd. "Added to the fact you are still here many hours after you were ejected. I don't think, though, you would have killed Kohinoor over a fee."

"I never do that, no," said Silvera. "I either collect my money or I don't. Most often I do."

"The freelance life," said the inspector with a sigh. "I chose the security of a civil job rather than attempt it. You may have noted my speech is frequently spiced with aphorisms."

"Yes, I noticed."

"The remnants of an ambition to be a lyric poet," said Inspector Ludd. "Did you know that when the Commando Killer struck two months ago in Esfola Territory he was seen and they got a description plus composite sketches?"

"No, it hasn't been in the news."

"Not as yet," said the inspector. "In a way it is disappointing. This Blackhawk house has been in the vicinity of almost all the attacks by the Commando Killer, and neither I nor any of the other investigators across Murdstone can link anyone in Blackhawk Manor with these crimes."

"Fingerprints, footprints?"

"No fingerprints and the only footprint we've found this time is that one there. We've made a cast of it."

"Belongs to nobody at the house?"

"It was made by an old commando boot of extremely large size. We haven't as yet located one inside, though my men are still searching," said the inspector. "The description and the eyewitness sketches I've gone over, and the brute looks like no one here."

"A disguise maybe."

"No," said Ludd. "Look at that footprint. The fellow is a giant and a brutal-looking shaggy fellow." He sighed again. "We rounded up all the giant brutal

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shaggy fellows in our files and got nothing. So I think . . .",

"What?"

"You no doubt recall the famous Nolan and Anmar case on Venus a generation ago."

"Double personality. Nolan turned himself into Anmar with a pill he'd invented."

"Exactly," said Ludd. "I have the feeling something similar may be involved here. Though there is no proof of any such thing."

Silvera scratched at the back of his neck. "The kid on the bicycle," he said.

"We found cycle tracks in the woods, yes. But no bike and no cyclist on the premises. No one admits having had such a visitor either. What do you know?"

"Something about that kid," said Silvera. "I saw him get here about nine last night, park his bicycle in the woods, and sneak into Blackhawk Manor through the back way. Yes, and he was one of the kids who came by earlier on the way to the Bike-in."

"You could recognize him?"

"Sure."

"We'll go looking at the Bike-in," the inspector said. "Sometimes the slenderest thread unravels the most of the sweater." He smiled at Silvera. "A sample of my aphoristic style."

Silvera smiled briefly.

Silvera walked among hundreds of parked cycles and around groups singing bicycle songs and groups taking off each other's clothes and groups dismantling and rebuilding bikes. All on a rolling grassy plain with a wide roadway bordering part of it.

"You look awfully old to be a bike person," said a half-dressed girl who was leaning against a unicycle.

"I thought so, too," answered Silvera, "until I fell under the spell of Burton Prester-Johns."

"That old twit," said the girl, rubbing her bare, freckled stomach. "He's disgusting. Whenever I see someone over thirty riding a bicycle, it makes me retch and gag."

"Those are interesting symptoms." Silvera glanced away from the girl and spotted Inspector Ludd wandering down through the crowds from the opposite side of the plain. "I'm looking for a guy who rides a 10-speed black Martian Wollter-brand bike. Lean guy, sandy hair, little moustache."

"Are you a law person? Law people make me have severe pains in the lower abdomen."

"I'm a freelance journalist, researching an in-depth story on the bicycle culture."

"That's repellent," said the girl. "Old gents way up in their thirties trying to understand youth. That makes me writhe and have severe chills."

"Maybe you ought to be home in bed."

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"That's all you old boys think of."

Silvera walked on. Then, over in the afternoon shade of a refreshment stand, he saw the sandy-haired boy. He caught the inspector's eye and nodded toward the stand.

The two of them began working through the crowd and toward the boy, who had one elbow against the yellow wall of the stand and was drinking a mug of May wine.

The boy sensed Silvera while he was still two hundred feet from him. He recognized the inspector apparently, turned on his left toes and ran off.

Silvera began to run, too, shouldering through cyclists. A plump albino boy took offense and threw his May wine in Silvera's face. Silvera kept running, wiping strawberries off his coat. He dashed around the refreshment stand, saw the boy starting up the plain toward the roadway, riding now on his black 10-speed bike.

Silvera stopped and grabbed up a parked 3-speed local bike. He only covered twenty feet before a girl cried out, "Aged bicycle thief!"

Three cycle singers leaped up, swinging lutes and mandolins.

Silvera pedaled hard. Four more boys came after him. They tackled both Silvera and the borrowed bike.

Leaving the bike seat, Silvera was carried ten feet and then dumped on the short grass. Before any of the four boys could jump on him he rolled, bowling over a picnic lunch for three. At the far side of the picnic drop cloth Silvera regained his feet. He ran, zigzagging, after the escaping boy.

He was tackled again, by three chunky girls in blue leather jerkins this time, a few yards short of the roadway. "Nasty old man," said one girl, hitting him up beside the ear with a bicycle pump.

"I'm only thirty-three," explained Silvera, ducking away from a second swing of the hard metal pump.

"Well, that's plenty old."

"Stop! The hand that takes up the sword against another often unsheaths more than it bargains for."

"What?" asked the girl who was jumping on Silvera's stomach with her bent knees.

Inspector Ludd, panting, said, "I mean he who would wear the judge's wig must first be abundantly certain he has the right-sized head."

"Drop the aphorisms," said Silvera, "and tell them you're a cop."

The three blocky girls stopped attacking Silvera. "You're a cop, granpappy?"

"Inspector Ludd of the Municipal Police, yes," said Ludd. "I have been trying to suggest that you ought to leave law enforcement to me."

As the girls drifted away, Sil-

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vera got himself up off the grass. "That was the kid I saw last night. He seems to have gotten away from us."

"I know who he is," said Inspector Ludd. "Which puts us one step closer to the solution."

Silvera decided to sit down again for a moment. "The greatest journeys often begin with a single step," he said and began dusting himself off.

The day ended and rain began to fall with the darkness. A rough wind came blowing through the pine woods and rattled the spires and shutters and dark carved wood of Blackhawk Manor. In the living room a fire was starting to take hold in the deep tile-bordered fireplace.

Inspector Ludd had taken off his plaid greatcoat and was in his dark two-piece civilian suit, pacing.

Dobbs said, "How can we reenact the crime, inspector?" He sipped at the glass of wine that had been passed to him a moment before by Dwiggins. "We are fairly certain, aren't we, this Commando Killer is someone from the outside, who more or less by coincidence, by repeated coincidence, happens to commit his crimes around our house. I'm no crime expert, like you and your boy Silvera. No, since my time is given over to the study of somewhat more important matters. Military matters. Such as the new book I'm putting together, *The Picture History of Trenches.*"

When everyone had been served a drink, the inspector said, "First, Silvera, tell them what we have found out."

Silvera was on the piano bench next to Willa. He lifted his hand from the small of her back and said, "A young guy named Roberto Koop came here on his bicycle last evening."

"Friend of yours, isn't he?" McLew Scribbeley asked his philosopher housemate.

"I'm not intimate with everyone who rides a bike," said Prester-Johns. "Possibly I met the young fellow during one of my encounters with our new bikocracy. What does he say?"

"The young man is being sought at the moment," said Inspector Ludd.

"The point is," said Silvera, "Koop has an uncle, Professor LeRoy Koop. Professor Koop has been doing some military research for the Murdstone Combined Armed Forces."

"Wait now," Dobbs interrupted. "That CAF stuff is all very secret."

"Inspector Ludd has been allowed to sit in on some of the briefings," said Silvera. "So he knows young Koop's uncle has developed a new drug, and it's known as Military Pills."

"These Military Pills," ex-

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plained the inspector, "can turn any average recruit into a giant vicious fighting man."

"I've never heard of them," said Dobbs.

"The Military Pills have been developed and completely tested. They were ready for extended use over three years ago," continued the inspector. "That they have not been widely used as yet is due to the fact the Combined Armed Forces have been tangled up in an ethical debate."

"We contacted Professor Koop late this afternoon," said Silvera. He hadn't touched his wine as yet. Setting the glass on the piano, he stood. "Koop eventually admitted young Roberto Koop had swiped several hundred Military Pills from him over a year ago and gone into hiding. He's apparently learned how to make the stuff and has been selling Military Pills through the underside of the territories. Some of his customers are probably higher placed. One of them, someone who has found the pills to be addictive, is in the house here."

Inspector Ludd said, "We were able to borrow some sample pills from Professor Koop." He smiled his half-round smile at them all. "A little earlier Silvera discovered an important clue. Because of his particular orientation he figured out where the Commando Killer had hidden his boots. We now have them."

"Where does that get you?" asked Prester-Johns.

"The Commando Killer," said Silvera, "is one of you. He takes the Military Pills and changes into a giant shaggy killer. All we have to do now is see who fits into the boots."

"They won't fit anybody," said Willa. "If this killer is a dual personality. I mean, it's his alter feet you want."

"Exactly," said the inspector. "Which is why we dissolved several of the tasteless Military Pills in your wine. Our discussion has gone on until everyone has finished his first glass. The drug, for those of you who aren't familiar with it, takes roughly fifteen minutes to take effect and lasts for two to three hours."

All the lights went out.

Silvera, as he'd rehearsed earlier, ran across the room and through a side door. He sprinted down a dark hallway and through another doorway. In this new dark room he got behind a full-length drape and waited.

In less than a minute a panel in the wall slid open and McLew Scribbeley stepped into the room. He turned on a desk lamp and got down on his hands and knees in front of a globe of the planet mounted on a tripod. He spun the Murdstone globe three times to the left, three to the right, once to the left. Then he pressed his fingers on five separate cities. The

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large globe clicked open, one quarter of it swinging out. Scribbeley thrust a hand inside. He raked out packets of paper money first, bags of coin next. Then he yanked out a giant pair of muddy commando boots. "That's odd," he muttered. "They're still here."

"We were just kidding." Silvera was out from behind the drapes, a small hand-blaster aimed at the kneeling publisher. "I'd figured it was you and we wanted to see where you had the damn shoes hidden. So we told you we'd already found them and you couldn't keep yourself from coming here to see if it was so."

"What do you know?" said Scribbeley. "How'd you decide it was me?"

"Most of the murders have been motiveless," said Silvera. "Something you couldn't help once the Military Pills got hold of you. You probably tried the stuff in the first place to boost your virility, but it didn't work out that way. Last night, though, you had a real reason for the killing. Kohinoor, I figure, came to you and pressured you. He was angry about the way you'd handled my complaints. He probably threatened to crack down on your book enterprises if you didn't settle. So you told him you'd pay him the $2000 you owed me. You told him to meet you outside after everybody'd turned in. You gave him the cash, and while he was still in the woods, you turned into your killer side."

"Son of a gun," said Scribbeley, standing by pressing on his knees. "You sure are a smart one, you dago rascal. Well, I confess you're absolutely correct. The thing you've overlooked is that I'm going to change into the Commando Killer. When I do, your little gun won't stop me." He paused, then roared and came at Silvera. He ran halfway to the window and then stopped, frowning at his hands. "That's odd, I'm not changing. Even though you put the stuff in the drinks."

"We were kidding about that, too," Silvera said.

Inspector Ludd came in with one of his captains. "A shot fired while blindfolded still sometimes finds a worthwhile target." They took Scribbeley from the room.

When Willa came to find Silvera a few moments later, he was at the globe. "Are you all right, Mr. Silvera?"

"Wait until I count out two thousand of this."

"All that cash and you're only taking two thousand?"

"That's all he owed me," said Silvera.

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Cynthia Goldstone is a painter (10 one-man shows) who writes, "I'm married and live next to the Mission Dolores, am a somewhat withered Flower-Child, an Aries, and a vegetarian." Avram Davidson is well known to readers of F&SF; his most recent book is THE PHOENIX AND THE MIRROR *(reviewed in this month's "Books"). Their collaboration is time travel with a twist that is at once both amusing and sober-minded.*

PEBBLE IN TIME

by Cynthia Goldstone and Avram Davidson

THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO, is certainly *my* city! I wouldn't live anywhere else than "The Port of Zion" for anything in the world. Perhaps my favorite worldly spot—next, of course, to Golden Gate Park—is the Embarcadero. Only two people have ever known how much thanks is due to one of them (now passed from Time into Eternity) that the sailors and seafarers have helped spread the Restored Gospel throughout the seven seas to the four corners of the earth. Of course its spread was inevitable, but I do think that if we Saints had stayed in, say, Missouri, our message would have been much slower in making its way around the world.

Not that I mean for a moment to indicate anything but the most wholehearted approval for the work done by our regularly appointed young missionaries, but of course nothing can equal the zeal and energy of sailors! And, walking down the Embarcadero and seeing the vigor with which they toss their Orange Julius drinks down their thirsty throats, I think how different the scene must be in (for example) that terribly overgrown and misnamed large city in Southern California, where seafarers may be seen abusing their systems by the use of alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee—all, of course, forbidden by *The Word of Wisdom* of the Prophet Joseph.

When I speak of the role

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played in this by one of the only two people who know the whole, true story, I am referring to my maternal grandfather. *I am the other.* And I suppose I'm a chip off the old block—or, perhaps, stated more exactly, a chip off the stalwart old Mormon family tree, so well set up (on paper, of course) by Grandpa Spence during the later years of his retirement. How he spent the earlier years, we will see very shortly. As is usual among L.D.S. people, I take a great interest in my ancestors, but most of all in Grandpa Spence. It may be because I inherited (if such things be hereditary) both his interest in genealogy and inventions, as well as that slight speech impediment which becomes troublesome only at moments of excitement. I have always said to myself, "Nephi Spence Nilsen, your grandfather rose above this, and so will you." It invariably helps. Grandpa was aware of all that and it constituted another bond between us. To sum it up: he and I both tended to stammer, both were interested in Mormon history and genealogy, both loved to consider mechanical devices.

It was a combination of these characteristics of Grandpa's which brought about a certain incident which I feel can now, safely, and *should* now, properly, be made known to one and all. And above and beyond that, my grandfather specifically (though in veiled language) asked me in his will to speak out on this matter at this particular time.

Grandpa was a peach. Perhaps it was the very enthusiasm of his devotion to the Latter Day Saints (though Grandma drew the line when he dutifully considered taking a second wife) which accounted for his unfailing good humor and zest even when he was quite old. Needless to say that he was a respected and responsible citizen, having for many years been Mechanical Supervisor for the various industries operated by the Latter Day Saints Church, and was valued for his circumspection as well as for his technical competence. Unfortunately (or fortunately: let History decide) his circumspection failed him at one crucial point in his life when—

But let me simply state the facts.

Grandpa had left England with a party of immigrants (all converts like himself) as an already full-grown young man of fifteen, crossed the plains to Great Salt Lake City, and within a short time was hired by President Brigham Young to copy letters in his clear and graceful longhand. His promotion in the Church was rapid, and after fifty years of remarkable service, he retired to his own three-story home on First North Street. Grandma had passed from

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Time into Eternity years before, and all the children had homes of their own; a neighbor lady acted as part-time housekeeper, leaving him free to follow his own inclinations in his own now fully free time.

The inspiration for the chief of these inclinations arose out of the only real regret that he had ever had. Much more out of his reverence for Mormon history than personal pride, he wished so much that he had not missed by only a year or so having been present on that great day when Brother Brigham led the weary pioneers to the bluff overlooking the great Utah valley and announced that they would stay and make the desert bloom like a rose. In his retirement, Grandpa Spence secretly determined to build a device which would transport him back to that decisive moment.

"I was born in the age of the covered wagon," he declared to himself, "and have lived to see the age of the flying machine. Eternity is one thing, but Time is another, and surely to a Saint nothing is impossible!" He was of course not certain of being able to *return*, he might even be scalped by an unconverted Lamanite, but to these considerations he gave but a shrug and a smile. His enormous dedication to the idea of fulfilling himself in this singular way enabled him to work like a steam engine (he *had* helped drive the Golden Spike at Promontory Point—Utah!—incidentally); he was a vigorous man with great inventive ability, and he was inspired. He completed the machine one bright May morning and got to Observation Bluff one hour and seventeen minutes before Brother Brigham and his advance party arrived.

Grandpa had not calculated on finding a smooth or barely downy chin instead of the full beard his hand automatically sought to stroke in satisfaction, but after a moment he realized what had happened: he had traveled back in time so successfully that he had become a stripling once again! Fortunately he had always been moderate in diet and his 20th-century clothes were only slightly loose. *Un*fortunately he no longer had the gravity and patience of his former years and soon became overanxious and restless. And as the pilgrim travelers approached, his excitement drew him away from the machine, which was well hidden by the bushes on the bluff above the new arrivals. He was recklessly determined to get as close as possible to the principals of this historic moment and to hear the historic words, *This is the place!* And in moving towards the travel-worn Saints, creeping along in the low bushes, he accidentally dislodged a stone, which tumbled down the slide, gaining momentum.

Forgetful of all else, he stood

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up to warn them out of the way, but in his excitement he found his speech impediment rendered him unable to release a sound . . .

The stone rolled and bounced and hit Brigham just above the worn and dusty boot on his right leg. The square, heavy face winced and swung around and saw the still-speechless stranger above on the bluff. All the weariness and travel of the long journey west, all the tragedy of the Mormon martyrdom, all the outrage of the persecuted was in Brigham's roar of pain and astonishment. "Look ye there!" he cried. "Who's that? Not a speck of dust on him! Throwing stones already! I thought this place was empty and I see that the Gentiles have got here before us!" And while poor young-again Spence struggled vainly to give utterance, regret, and denial, Brigham turned and swung his arm in a great, determined arc.

"This is not the place!" he cried. *"Onward!"*

Not for a moment did anyone dream of controverting the word of the President, Prophet, Revelator, and Seer. *Onward! they echoed.* And *onward* they went. And the conscience-stricken young stranger, where did *he* go? Well, where *could* he go? He went after them, *onward,* of course. Of course they couldn't make heads or tails of his stammering explanations, nor even of the ones he attempted to write. But they understood that he was sorry. That was enough. Mormons have suffered too much to be vindictive. And that night when the band camped, he was brought to the leader's wagon, where a small lamp burned.

"Young man," said Brigham, "they tell me that you have expressed a seemly contrition for having raised your hand against the Lord's Anointed; therefore I forgive you in the name of Israel's God. They also say you write a good, clear hand. Sit down. There's pen and ink and paper. *Dear Sister Simpson, It cannot have escaped your attention that I have observed with approbation your*

—no, make that—

the modesty of your demeanor, equally with your devotion to the doctrines and covenants of the Latter Day Saints, which is of far greater importance than the many charms with which a benign Nature has adorned your youthful person. My advanced years will always assure you of mature advice, and in my other seventeen—is it seventeen? or nineteen?—pshaw, boy!—a man can't keep all these figures in his head—*my other eighteen wives you will find a set of loving sisters. Since it is fitting that we be sealed for Time and Eternity, kindly commence packing now in order to depart with the next party of Saints heading for our original destination which*

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as you know was tentatively the peninsula called San Francisco in Upper California. Yours & sic cetera, B. Young, Pres., Church of J.C. of L.D.S.—sand it well, son, for I hate a blotty document."

You've all read your history and must certainly have often felt thankful that Brother Brigham did not yield to the momentary impulse he admitted he had, and that he did not stop in Utah. Despite its impressive name, Great Salt Lake City is just a tiny town with a pleasant enough view, but even that can't compare with the one from my window alone. It's a pleasant thing to sit here in my apartment atop the hill on Saint Street, sipping a tall, cool lemonade, and admire the view. To the west is the great span of Brigham Young Bridge across the Golden Gate, with its great towers and seven lanes of cars; to the east is the Tabernacle, its other-worldly shape gracing the Marina Green, with the stately Temple nearby. I see a network of wide, dignified streets feathered with light green trees, giving the city the look of a great park. And, being truly a *Mormon* city, it is undisfigured by a single liquor saloon, tearoom, tobacconist, or coffee house.

And Grandpa? After his retirement, he sold his house on Joseph Smith Esplanade and moved to the fine apartment in the Saint-Ashbury District where I now live. Having decided to leave well enough alone the second time around, he devoted his *last* last years entirely to the study of Latter Day Saint genealogy. He felt right at home here, as do I, and why not? After all, the Saint-Ashbury can boast of more lemonade and Postum stands per square block than any place in the U.S.A., and one is always seeing and hearing those inspiring and exciting initials: L.D.S.! L.D.S.! L.D.S.!

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THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES

by Isaac Asimov

ONE OF THE PITFALLS TO COMMUNICATION lies in that little phrase "It's obvious!" What is obvious to A, alas, is by no means obvious to B and is downright ridiculous to C.

For instance, just a week ago, a storekeeper was writing out a receipt for me. He asked my name, I gave it and, as I do automatically, began to spell it, slowly and clearly. (I am absurdly sensitive about having my name misspelled.)

He got the I-S-A-A-C right but by the time I had gotten as far as A-S-I- in the spelling of the last name he had raced ahead and finished it as M-O-F.

"No, no, no," I said, pettishly, "it ends with a V, a *V*."

He changed it to A-S-I-M-O-V, looked at it a moment and then said, "I see. You spell it the way the author does."

Well obviously I do, but it came as a big surprise to him that I chose to do so.

That's a small item; here's a bigger one. If anyone asks me what I think of astrology, I say something like: "It's stuff and nonsense, sheerest bilge, absolute tripe. —Obviously!"

Except that there's nothing obvious about it to most people.

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Astrology is more popular today than ever before in history, and more people than ever make a good living out of it. I have read that there are 5,000 astrologers in the United States and over 10,000,000 true believers.

There was a time when I could have shrugged that off and said something like: "Oh, well, finding that one American out of 20 is gullible and unsophisticated is no great shock."

But the greatest popularity-explosion in astrology right now is among the college students who, one might suppose, are the well-read, the intelligent, the sophisticated, the hope of the future.

The question arises then: If the collegiates are taking up astrology, how can it be "obviously" absolute tripe?

It can be tripe with no trouble at all. Consider—.

1) It is fashionable right now, especially among college students, to oppose the establishment; that is, to take up a position directly antagonistic to the one accepted by the leaders of some particular segment of society. Some young men do it out of considered thought and honest emotion, and I sympathize. (I'm rather anti-establishment in some ways myself, for all that I'm a little over thirty and am approaching late youth.)

Let's face it, though. Many college students oppose the establishment just because it is fashionable in their set to do so and for no other reason. The opposition is quite blind as far as they are concerned, and they could easily be manipulated into crewcuts, for instance, if President Nixon would only make the supreme sacrifice and grow long hair.

Well, there is such a thing as a scientific establishment, too. There is an accepted canon of scientific thought which says (among other things) that the characteristic quality of astrological lore is very like the excrement of the male bovine, and that is enough reason for many an ardent youngster to become an enthusiastic astrologian.

2) We live in troubled times. To be sure, all times are troubled (as some bland pundit is certain to say at this point) but none has ever been quite as troubled as ours is. When before have we had the inestimable pleasure of knowing that one hasty move can blow up the world in a half-hour display of thermonuclear temper-tantrum? When before have we had the exciting choice of being brought to chaos and destruction by either over-population or over-pollution within half a century without anyone being sure which will win the race?

Yet in this tottering society of ours, science has no pat answers. It has only a program of procedure, a system for asking questions and testing

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the answers for validity—with the very good chance that said answers will prove invalid. Opposed to this are various systems of mysticism which give answers loudly, clearly, and confidently. Wrong answers, to be sure, but what's the difference?

The sad thing for us rationalists is that the vast majority of the human race would rather be told that "Two and two is five and make no mistake about it," than "I think it is possible that two and two may be four."

3) College students are no more a homogeneous group than is any other large classification of humanity. Not all of them are interested in science; not all of them are truly bright. Many of them are just bright enough to discover that what counts in this phony world is merely the ability to *sound* bright—an ability which has carried many men to high political office.

It is easier, they soon learn, to sound bright in some subjects than others. It is, for instance, just about impossible to sound bright in mathematics or the physical sciences without actually being bright. The facts, observations and theories are too well established. There is a firm consensus, and you have to know a great deal about that consensus before you can sound bright, and for that you have to *be* bright.

The consensus is shakier in the social sciences; still shakier in the humanities; and in matters such as mystical eastern cults (just to take an example) there is no consensus at all.

Someone who spouts nonsense in chemistry will be caught at once by any high-school student who knows something about chemistry. Someone who spouts nonsensical literary criticism, however, can be spotted only with difficulty. Indeed, what are the criteria for nonsense in literary criticism? Do you know? Does anyone?

As for mysticism, hah! Your bluff in this field cannot possibly be called. Make up a chant such as: Toilet Tissue, Toilet Tissue, Toilet, Toilet, Tissue, Tissue— Tell everybody that this chant repeated 666 times (the number of the beast) will induce inner serenity and cosmic consciousness, and you will be believed. Why not? It sounds no worse than anything else in mysticism, and you will become a highly respected swami.

To put it as briefly as possible: Many college students are taking up astrology in a big way because: 1) it is the in-thing to do, 2) it gives them a delicious, if false, sense of security, and 3) it gives them a passport to phony intellectualism.

And none of that is at all inconsistent with astrology being tripe.

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The funny part is that astrology started off as the best science man could find.

In man's cultural dawn, when the Universe seemed a whimsical place and the gods were constantly hitting one over the head without good reason, there had to be some system for finding out what those troublesome divinities wanted. Desperately, priests sought answers by watching the flight of birds, the shape of the livers of sacrificed animals, the fall of dice, and so on.

These events were essentially random in nature, but early man did not recognize the principle of randomness. (Many of our contemporaries don't either.) All events were either man-controlled or god-controlled, and if a particular event was not man-controlled, it therefore had to be god-controlled. So people study tea-leaves and head-bumps and palm-creases even today.

A great advance was made by certain priests (probably in Sumer, a land which later became Babylonia, then Chaldea, Mesopotamia and finally Iraq). If I may be allowed to reconstruct what their reasoning may have been, here it is.

The gods, they may have argued, could scarcely be so inefficient and so wasteful in time and effort as to make special messages for each occasion. How un-godly to take the trouble to create particular livers or to send a particular bird flying in a particular direction, or to go to the trouble of thundering in this quarter of the sky or that, every time there was something to say.

A truly great god would scorn such trivia. He would instead create some natural phenomenon that was continuous and yet complex—a kind of moving finger that would steadily write the history of the world in all its facets and would act as adviser for man. Instead of man depending on the uncertainties of special revelation, he would merely have to work out the laws that governed the continuous but orderly complexity of the natural phenomenon.*

The one natural phenomenon that was absolutely steady and inexorable, that could apparently be set into motion once and for all, was the movements of the heavenly bodies.

The Sun rose and set day after day and, at its daily peak, shifted north and south in a slower rhythm. The Moon rose and set day by day

If the early astrologers argued in this fashion, and very possibly they did, they were imbued with the spirit of science, and I honor them. No scholar can be maligned for being wrong in the light of the knowledge of a later period. If he strives for knowledge in the terms of his own time, he is a member of the brotherhood of science.

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and changed phases in a slower rhythm. The mathematical rules describing these changes were not simple, but were not so complex that they could not be worked out.

Furthermore, these shifts clearly affected the Earth. The Sun caused the alternation of day and night by its rising and setting, and the slower alternation of seasons by its movement north and south. The Moon's rising and setting (along with its phases, which were easily seen to be related) gave successions of lighter nights and dimmer ones. (Its phases were also related to the tides—a fact of extraordinary importance—but for various reasons this wasn't firmly noted till the end of the 17th Century.)

Obviously, if the shifting Sun and Moon could affect conditions on Earth, then an "astrologic code" must exist. If you can predict the change in shifts in the heavens, you ought to be able to predict the change in conditions on the Earth.

Of course, it is rather trivial to predict that tomorrow morning the Sun would rise and the Earth would light up, or that the Moon was waning and the nights would grow dark, or even that the noonday Sun was shifting northward and that cold weather was therefore on its way. All that was simple enough for ordinary men to handle, and it lacked detail. Would there be enough rainfall? Would the crops prosper? Would there be war or pestilence? Would the queen have a baby son?

For that the sky had to be studied in greater detail.

We will never know what early observer or observers began making systematic observations of the position of the Moon and the Sun against the starry background. The thousands of stars maintained their relative position night after night, year after year, generation after generation (so that they were called "fixed stars"), but the Sun and Moon shifted position with respect to them. Eventually, the Greeks called them "planets" ("wanderers") because they wandered among the stars.

Both Moon and Sun took a certain fixed path among the stars, the two paths being fairly close together. They traveled at different rates, however. While the Sun made one complete circuit around the heavens, the Moon managed to make twelve. (Actually twelve and a fraction, but why complicate matters.)

It was useful then to mark off the path by means of easily detected signposts—a development probably started by the Sumerians but brought to perfection by the Greeks.

Suppose you take a strip of stars in a circle around the heavens; the particular strip of stars that contains the paths of the Sun and the Moon;

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and divide it into twelve equal parts or "signs." Start the Sun and the Moon in the same place in one of those signs. By the time the Moon has gone around once and returned to the sign, the Sun has moved one-twelfth of the way round and shifted into the next sign. Another circuit of the Moon would find the Sun shifting into the next sign after that.

As an aid to the memory, draw patterns among the stars in each sign, preferably patterns that resemble familiar animals, and you have twelve constellations making up the "zodiac" ("circle of animals").

Once you start to study the zodiac carefully, you are bound to discover five bright stars that are *not* fixed but that wander round the zodiac as the Sun and Moon do. These are five more planets, in other words, and we know them today as Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.

These new planets add immeasurably to the complications of the heavens and, therefore, to the potential of the "astrologic code." Some of them move quite slowly. Saturn, for instance, makes only one complete circle of the sky while the Moon is making 360 of them. What's more, while the Sun and Moon always move from west to east against the background of the stars, the other planets sometimes shift direction and briefly move east to west in what is called "retrograde motion." Saturn does it no less than 29 times during the course of a single revolution.

I stress the point that the early astrologers were not fakers. If they had been charlatans, it would have been much easier to stick to birds and livers.

Establishing the background of astrology meant watching the skies night after night, making painstakingly accurate observations and, in short, working one's head off.—And what astrologers discovered was factual and valuable. Their observations represented the beginnings of real astronomy and have remained a completely valid description of the machinery of the Solar system (relative to a stationary Earth) to this very day.

Where the astrologers went wrong was not in their description of the heavens but in their working out of the "astrologic code." And even here they must have done their best to be rational.

Where could you find a clue to the code? Suppose there was an event in the heavens that was extremely rare. Would that not mean that any equally rare event that followed on Earth would be related to it? And could not one learn something from the relationship?

For instance, suppose there was an eclipse. Suppose it was one of those rare occasions when the Moon was slowly blotted out of the

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heavens; or one of those even rarer occasions when the Sun was. Would not that be followed by some equally notable event on Earth?

The question almost answered itself, for eclipses struck absolute panic in the hearts of all who watched, and understandably so. It is routine to laugh at that panic, but don't. Suppose you knew very well that your life depended on the Sun and suppose you watched the Sun slowly fading before an encroaching blackness for reasons you could not explain. Would you not feel the Sun was dying? And that all life would die with it?

(Consider that in our own "sophisticated" time it is only necessary for some solemn idiot to proclaim that California will fall into the Pacific Ocean on 3 P.M. of next Thursday to cause a quick exodus of uncounted thousands from that state.)

Well, then, if an eclipse is so rare and frightening a phenomenon, it is very easy and almost inevitable to argue that its consequence must be an equally rare and frightening event on earth. In short, an eclipse must portend disaster.*

But never mind theory. Does disaster follow an eclipse in actual fact?

Sure it does. In any year with an eclipse there is some catastrophe somewhere, and this is easy to see since in *every* year, eclipse or not, there is some catastrophe somewhere.

Astrologers seize upon the catastrophes that follow eclipses to prove their point and ignore the equal catastrophes that follow non-eclipse. Unscientific? Certainly. But very human. (In this very enlightened year in which we live, try arguing with someone who firmly believes that lighting three on a match is unlucky. Tell him that misfortunes happen even when only two on a match are lit and see how far you'll get.)

As it happens, it could not have taken very long for the early astrologers to learn the cause of eclipses. They would note that the Moon was eclipsed whenever it was on the side of the Earth directly opposite the Sun, and therefore in the Earth's shadow. They would note that the Sun was eclipsed whenever it and the Moon were precisely in the same spot in the sky and we were therefore in the Moon's shadow.

By carefully calculating the motions of the Moon and the Sun, it was possible to predict lunar eclipses in advance without too much trouble. (Some think that the ancient Britons used Stonehenge for the purpose in 1500 B.C.) Solar eclipses were harder to calculate but eventually they, too, could be handled.

It is easy to see that astrologers would be tempted to keep their

The very word "disaster" is from a Greek term meaning, essentially, "evil stars."

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methods secret. The common folk wouldn't be able to follow the calculations anyway and would be annoyed if they were asked to. Besides, the astrologers probably found their social standing and their security much enhanced if they could predict eclipses without letting on that anyone could do it if he would but take the trouble to master the mathematics involved.

Of course, it had its risks. A Chinese legend reports that in very ancient times an eclipse came to the capital without warning because the royal astronomers, Hsi and Ho, preoccupied with a drinking bout, somehow neglected to let it be known that it was going to happen. After the emperor had gotten over his imperial fright at the unexpected event, the suddenly sobered astronomers were led off to execution and all agreed that it was richly deserved.

An eclipse could have more beneficent results, too. Farther west, in ancient times, the Sun's disc was encroached upon by darkness, little by little, over a field of battle in Asia Minor. The armies of Lydia on the west and Media on the east stopped fighting and peered at the vanishing Sun. The few minutes of eclipse-night came, and when they had passed, the opposing generals could do only one thing. They signed a treaty of peace and went home. Lydia and Media never fought again, for they knew the anger of the gods when they saw it.*

As it happens, modern astronomers can calculate the exact date of the eclipse of the Sun that took place in Asia Minor at about that time. It was on May 28, 585 B.C., so that the Lydian-Median battle that came to a premature end is the earliest event in all history that can be pinned down to an exact day.

The Greek philosopher, Thales, was supposed to have predicted the eclipse, though not to the exact day—merely that one would take place that year. He is supposed to have traveled in Babylonia in his youth, and he probably learned the prediction-trick from astronomers there.

There was another astronomical event that broke the quiet routine of the heavens, and that was the coming of a comet.

Taken overall, it created even worse terror than that caused by an eclipse, for several reasons—

Whereas an eclipse came and went in a relatively short period of time, a comet would remain in the sky for weeks and months. Whereas an eclipse involved perfectly regular shapes (arcs of circles), comets

*This perpetual peace is not as impressive as it might be, for both nations disappeared from the map about thirty years later when Cyrus of Persia conquered them. No doubt if they had endured longer they would eventually have forgotten the lesson of the eclipse and gone back to war.

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had weird and ominous forms: a fuzzy head with a long tail that might look like a sword suspended over the earth, or the disordered hair of a shrieking woman. (The very word "comet" is from a Greek word for "hair.")

Finally, whereas an eclipse could be predicted even in ancient times, the coming of a comet could not be. A system for predicting the arrival of *some* comets wasn't worked out till the 18th Century.

Comets, then, were even surer indications of catastrophe than eclipses were, and were indeed followed by catastrophes for the same reason.

Thus in 1066, the comet we now call Halley's Comet appeared in the sky just as William of Normandy was making ready to invade England. It predicted catastrophe, and that is exactly what came, for the Saxons lost the Battle of Hastings and passed under the permanent rule of the Normans. The Saxons couldn't have asked for a better catastrophe than that.

On the other hand, if the Saxons had won and had hurled William's expeditionary force into the Channel, that would have been catastrophe enough for the Normans.

Whichever side lost, the comet was sure to win.

With eclipses and comets serving so excellently to predict events on Earth, the principle of the "astrologic code" seemed well established and the technique, too, for it seemed to work on the principle of similarity. A disappearing Sun bespoke disappearing prosperity; a comet with a tail like a sword bespoke war, and so on.

With the Greeks, democracy invaded astrology. In the east, the philosophy of the oriental monarchies, where only the king counted, kept astrology the handmaiden of high political affairs. Among the individual-centered Greeks, the personal horoscope came into use.

One could imagine them arguing that since the Sun was the brightest of the planets (using the word in the ancient sense) it had the most to do with the individual. In which sign was the Sun at the moment of that individual's birth? If it were in the constellation of Libra (the scales), ought he not to be of even and judicious temperament; if it were in Leo (the Lion), ought he not to prove a brave warrior?

If you stop to think that the ancients thought the heavenly bodies were small objects quite close to the Earth, and the constellations somehow really represented the things they seemed to represent, it all makes a weird kind of sense.

Even so there were two important groups in the palmy days of the Greeks who opposed astrology.

The Greek philosophical school of Epicureanism opposed it because

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their view of the Universe was essentially an atheist one. They felt the heavenly bodies moved purposelessly and that no gods existed to weave meaning into their motions.

The other group was that of the Jews, who were unusual among the peoples of the time, for being cantankerously monotheistic. They were not scientifically minded and they used no rational argument to oppose astrology. (They would have been unspeakably horrified at the Epicurean reasoning.) It was just that those who supported astrology were pagans and considered the planets to be gods, and this was anathema, on principle, to the Jews.

Yet even the Jews were not wholly uninfluenced by astrology. The older writings that appear in the Bible were carefully edited in Greek times by pious Rabbis intent on wiping out unedifying traces of a polytheistic past—but the erasures weren't perfect.

Thus, on the fourth day of Creation, the Bible states: "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years." (Genesis 1:14). That little word "signs" is an astrologic hangover.

A clearer one is to be found in the Song of Deborah, one of the oldest passages in the Bible, an ancient poem too well-known to endure much tampering. After the defeat of Sisera, Deborah sang: "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." (Judges 5:20.)

Neither the Epicureans nor the Jews prevailed, however. Astrology continued and was exceedingly popular in the 17th Century when modern astronomy came gloriously into its own. In fact, some of the very founders of modern astronomy—Johannes Kepler, for instance—were astrologers, too.

But by the end of the 17th Century, with a true picture of a heliocentric Solar system established, astrology finally became a pseudo-science. It passes human understanding to suppose that the vast Universe we now recognize is arranged only as a key for our own insignificant dust-speck. That so many men and women believe it is, just the same, is a remarkable tribute to the manner in which human folly can triumph.

Still, science has its prestige even among its enemies. There are those devotees of astrology who know just enough about real astronomy to seek some legitimate scientific rationale for the pseudo-science.

And such is the ingenuity of man, particularly when it is misapplied, that such a rationale (extraordinarily weak but a rationale, nevertheless) can actually be found. I'll talk about that next month.

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This deft and immensely entertaining story is about George Mapstead, who wanted to be a writer. The instructor at the adult school class wasn't much help, and George was getting nowhere until he figured out that the most important thing in writing is for the writer to insulate himself from the problems of ordinary life. This can best be done, of course, at a high elevation, in a circular room with walls of slick, off-white stuff . . .

OUT OF CONTROL

by Raylyn Moore

"IT'S GRUELING WORK TO make your characters live and breathe," said Mr. Culp strenuously, as moisture collected and channeled on his gray face. "But this course is called creative writing for a reason. If you want to be a writer, you must create, create, CREATE!"

For the first time, Culp's words kindled a small fire in the otherwise unresponsive brain of George Mapstead, even though George knew that old Culp was only filling up the minutes remaining until nine thirty when another adult-school night class would be over and he, Culp, could get his palsied hands on the Listerine bottle which waited in the top drawer of the desk.

"—wound and the bow," the teacher was going on, "—desperate responsibility of the storyteller to hold the wavering attention of the wedding guest who hears the loud bassoon."

Years ago, George also knew, Culp had been an assistant professor of English at some college. Then he had written some novel and gone to Hollywood, and stayed on there writing for television, and then ended up here in Hopeful Valley, California, in semi-retirement after stopovers in several private sanitoria.

George Mapstead, on the other hand, had made his own mistakes. Twenty years ago, when he was eighteen, he had married Peggy Pummell at the insistence of her father and his own. From that time life had been a groaning

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merry-go-round of overdrafts, clogged plumbing, and enduring visits from his wife's relatives.

It was not that George did not like his family. He was a good father, a passable husband. Or that he hated his job. He had never really minded working for the gas company and had been given several respectable promotions over the two decades. The problem was simply the terrible feeling, worsening year by year, that no matter how hard he worked, no matter what he did or thought or planned, matters were completely out of his hands. Things went right on happening and happening again, and he could never stem the tide.

Every time another in-law moved in with the Mapsteads, every time one of the built-in household conveniences broke down, every time Peggy told him, "I think I'm pregnant again," George had thought he'd go to pieces, and finally he had.

They had called it a nervous breakdown and sent him away for a while. Then they had sent him home again and told George what he needed was a hobby, some uncomplicated pursuit which would be of therapeutic value. The gas company had been very nice, in view of his long service, about giving him an extended leave until he could "get on his feet again." So George, temporarily at least, had all the free time in the world.

"The most important thing, though—and I can't make this point too strongly—is to remain at all times in control of your material," Mr. Culp summed up, fingering the pull on the top drawer of the desk. George nodded in sincere agreement. "We have just a few more minutes. Any questions or comments?"

Miss Heather Quincy, who aspired to write sonnets, raised a hand. "Ah, Mr. Culp," she said, "you express everything so lyrically that I could never presume to add to what you've been saying."

"Yes?" Culp encouraged her gamely.

"So I only want to agree about making characters into real people. I've a whimsy that if a character is portrayed well by a writer, with enough *feeling* that is—"

"Yes?"

"—then he would actually live. Somewhere. What I mean is—"

"Yes, yes. Quite," Culp agreed vaguely, "—thought myself there must be a place somewhere with Eustacia Vye and Molly Bloom and Albertine walking around in the flesh. In another dimension perhaps. Ha-ha. Next question?"

After class George Mapstead, still in a state of euphoria from what he had heard, went home and sat down to his typewriter. From that moment he began to write seriously.

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During the weeks George had spent in the hospital, certain changes had occurred around the Mapstead home. Peggy had applied for a license to run a preschool in the backyard; her old lady had gone to work as a hired picket, and even her brother had found a job at a hotel and moved out of the upstairs sunporch after an occupancy of six months.

George had known briefly the keen humiliation of discovering that he was dispensable after all, but he had not been fool enough to fail to turn the change to his advantage. He had bought a secondhand typewriter and installed it on the sunporch. He had put a heavy bolt on the inside of the sunporch door to insure privacy, and then he had enrolled in Mr. Culp's class in compliance with his doctor's order about the hobby. George's hobby might as well be writing as anything else, he decided.

At first, though, he'd had a terrible time getting started, hampered as he was by never having been much of a reader. (When would he have had time?) Each of the things which occurred to him that he might want to write—a novel about what the world would have been like if the South had won the Civil War, a story about a man making a visit to the center of the earth, a book about a boy of about twelve years old who has supernatural powers—he discovered upon visits to the library and in discussions with his literate acquaintances had already been done by other writers.

The night Mr. Culp discussed creation and control was George's third week in the creative-writing class, and he had grown so discouraged he was already wondering if there wasn't still time to drop out and sign up instead for the ceramics group which met in the classroom next door.

Afterward, though, when he had really gotten down to business at his typewriter, he didn't emerge from the sunporch for three days. And that first long stay set a precedent. Eventually he knew that Peggy had taken to thinking of him in terms of water splashes around the bathroom shower stall in the early mornings and an occasional slab of pot roast removed from the refrigerator during the night.

Still he worked on, knowing that if he were ever going to accomplish what he now realized he wanted to do, it would have to be soon, before Mr. Culp's eye-opening inspiration palled.

Though Peggy did not complain, she did react. At those times when George appeared red-eyed and unshaven from the sunporch and wandered downstairs, he found his wife friendly but watchful. And if he went out, he knew she waited around at the front of the house for his return,

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anxious over whether or not the bundles he carried up to the sunporch were really only the reams of paper they were supposed to be. For just prior to George's breakdown, he had been drinking heavily. He had reached, in fact, the saturation point for most human beings. At all costs, his doctor had pronounced darkly, he must be prevented from taking alcohol again. If he did, there was simply no predicting what might happen.

Meanwhile, George Mapstead worked and worked.

"Lorelei," he wrote during the early days of his new life, "was every man's dream." He x'd that out. Nebulous. Descriptions would no doubt have to be specific. He thought of a third-grade substitute teacher he'd once lost his heart to as a child and wrote, "Lorelei's skin was blended snow and honey. She was affectionate, discriminating, chic, adorable, even-tempered, tractable, and willing to please." Guiltily he thought of plump Peggy with her dishwater-colored, gnawed-off hair and wrote, "Lorelei was slim and graceful and her bright hair fell like a flame from hell—" He x'd out the last six words. Plagiaristic. Creating by definition had to be original.

Gradually, word by painfully selected word, Lorelei really did begin to take exquisite shape. He could see her, breathe her essence, feel her nearness; she was as close as his own mind. And one day George added a final period to a final draft. It was a Tuesday, class night.

"Sorry, Mapstead," Mr. Culp said as he handed George back his typescript at the end of the evening. "An interestingly drawn character, but you've forgotten the most important element in literature."

"What?" George wanted to know.

"Conflict," the teacher declared, fixing a bleared gaze on the handle of the desk drawer.

"But I thought you said," George objected, "that the most important thing was control."

For a moment Mr. Culp looked puzzled, and even wearier than usual. "Did I? Control? Yes, of course, control. Look here, Mapstead, I have an important date right now. See me a few minutes before class next time, won't you? And we'll hash this thing over."

So George went back to his sunporch. That night he created a man named Ralph and put him into the story about Lorelei. However, in view of what Culp had said, George suspected that one man and one girl don't necessarily amount to conflict, his own twenty-year experience with Peggy notwithstanding. So he also created Curtis. When George took the story back to class the next week, Culp read it as if he had

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never seen it before and when pressed for a comment by George, admitted it was "coming along."

But now George himself was struck by a growing dissatisfaction and impatience. He had done everything Culp had suggested, taken up his every scrap of advice on writing as if it were gold coin; yet still he remained short of the real goal. Hadn't old Culp promised that characters could be made to live? Lorelei was alive all right, he knew that. What remained was for him somehow to transport himself to wherever she was. How other writers managed this was the only remaining mystery, but he never doubted that they could, and did. Why else write?

George went up to his teacher as the next class broke up. "Remember, Mr. Culp, how you said that literary characters really exist somewhere if they're convincing enough? Have you any idea where that place is, how I could get there myself?"

Mr. Culp, who had been waiting in a seemingly stuporous slump for the fifteen class members to clear the room, rose from his chair with astonishing alacrity and put the length of the oak desk between himself and George Mapstead. He had plainly forgotten all about his earlier conversation in class with Miss Heather Quincy. "The most important thing to remember, Mapstead," he said, licking his parched lips nervously, "is if you're going to write, stay away from Hollywood."

For a time after this, George's work fell off. While he still spent most of his days and nights on the sunporch, the noises which emanated from there were more often the sounds of pacing than those of a typewriter. Casting a distracted glance at his early-morning face in the bathroom mirror, George himself saw that he was growing hollow about the eyes.

Slyly, he began watching Peggy watching him, screening his departures and arrivals ever more carefully. She would inevitably be waiting at the foot of the stairs when George came home. One night she demanded to be shown what George was carrying in the pocket of his jacket, but it turned out to be only a large bottle of Listerine.

When George woke, his first thought was for the interior of his mouth where he detected the remembered flavor of library paste and old copper coins. Cautiously he activated an aching muscle here and there and discovered he had fallen asleep at his desk with his head in his arms, his arms on the typewriter.

Finally rousing himself all the way, he further discovered that the chair, desk, and typewriter were no longer on the sunporch but had been removed to a perfectly circular room at a high ele-

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vation, judging by the view from a near window, obviously a room in a tower. The walls were of an interesting off-white, slick sort of building block. Examining the material more closely, he found it exuded the warmth of animal matter rather than the chill of mineral; the stuff was definitely ivory.

He looked again from the window and was unsurprised to see, through a pleasant pinkish mist which swirled in soft air currents around the top of the tower, three figures wandering below on what appeared to be a totally barren plain.

Instead of dashing from the room to get down there immediately, George took time for a proud and lengthy savoring of the situation. From that distance at least, Lorelei seemed to be exactly as he had created her. She even wore the pale-gold Empire gown and Greek sandals he had seen on Olivia de Haviland or somebody once in a movie and then recalled and written down as suitable for his own heroine. Her hair, as he had intended, was a dazzling cascade down her lovely back, and she moved with the fluidity of a doe. Ralph and Curtis, however, left much to be desired, George saw when he could at last tear his attention from Lorelei. Not caring nearly so much about them, he had not taken many pains about their appearance, and they had come out as dull-looking and indistinguishable as long-circulated dollar bills.

It was his fault too that the plain on which the three appeared was nothing but brown dirt. In his writing so far, George had given no thought to surroundings.

He decided to rectify that part first, and maybe later he could sharpen up the two men if he felt equal to it. Thoughtfully he rolled a sheet of paper into the typewriter. "There were trees," George wrote and peered down out of the window again. Nothing had changed.

"There were trees," George typed again, really feeling it this time. "A grove of sycamores rose beside the banks of a crystal stream which flowed through verdant meadows. Beside a rock-lined pool edged with fern—" He leaned out the window and smiled with the satisfaction of achievement.

He found it was far better than writing back on the sunporch in Hopeful Valley where he had stared from the windows into Peggy's lines of damp laundry and seen Lorelei only in his head. But in no time he was aware of the immediacy of old Culp's dictum about the need for conflict. For there seemed nothing else to do in the tower room but amuse himself at the typewriter, and if the people below were going to do nothing but wander aimlessly,

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would it be enough even to hold George's own interest?

So he added a wild boar to the woods and snakes to the grass. He labored for a while on a minor melodrama of frights for Lorelei and rescues by Curtis and Ralph, who competed for these opportunities. Until finally he was overwhelmed by a creeping exhaustion. Creative writing was a lot of work, all right. Culp had been right on that point too.

But on the heels of this weariness came a slow realization. He had been marking time until he could get on with the real business, but why wait? He was in charge of everything here, wasn't he?

Tired as he was, he turned back to the typewriter and tapped out, "Darkness came, and Lorelei retired to her stone cottage on the banks of the stream." And so that Curtis and Ralph would present no awkward difficulties to his plan for what was, after all, George's own dream girl, he quickly created a couple of grass huts far upstream and sent the pair of rivals off to bed for ten hours.

There was a precipitous circular staircase leading down out of George's tower, and outside a winding path to the base of a cliff where the landscape he had seen from the window began. In the meadow a night breeze he had set in motion with his typewriter before he left ruffled the heads of George's daisies and the blades of George's grass. He was still proud of it all even though he could detect, at this closer range, certain shortcomings which he would correct when he returned to the tower. He had forgotten birds, for one thing, and the insects, with which he *had* remembered to stock his meadow, were threatening to take over.

Or would it be necessary to return to the tower? "There were birds," George shouted experimentally, really feeling it. Nothing happened. Well, he could go back and *get* the typewriter, he supposed, but the thought of the long walk back up the cliff and then up the stairs in his exhausted state was too much. And anyway, on an errand such as his present one, wouldn't it look rather curious for him to appear lugging a big old desk-model L. C. Smith?

He went on to Lorelei's, tapped at her door, and when there was no answer, pushed it boldly. It opened. The cottage was bare inside—he had neglected to furnish it—and he found Lorelei in one of the rooms in a half-sitting, half-reclining posture against the wall. She seemed almost comatose.

Alarm replaced his sense of pleasurable anticipation as he bent over her, but just then the door blew shut behind George, and Lorelei spoke. "Whassat!" she whispered.

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"Lorelei, darling," he answered happily. "It's me, George."

"My God!" she moaned.

"Well, yes, if you want to put it that way," he admitted.

After that, though, she fell silent and eventually George was forced to admit that her words had all been reflexive, the involuntary phrases of a sleepwalker. He tried kissing, embracing, a really rude shaking. "She rose up," he shouted wildly into the darkness, "and threw her arms around the man to whom she owed her very existence." It was all equally useless of course, and finally George had to content himself with sitting there for a while on the floor with her, his arms around her and her gleaming hair falling over his shoulder even though he now knew that without the typewriter she could not see him, that to her his touch was so much air.

Very well then, he would write himself into the story.

As soon as he got back to the tower, he wrested the unwieldy typewriter off the desk and with effort carried it all the way down the winding stairs, only to discover that no matter which way he turned it, the instrument could not be maneuvered through the door leading outside. It was a narrow door, just wide enough for a man to pass through, a lean man like George Mapstead.

After puffing all the way upstairs again, still bearing along the machine, he found that the typewriter would slip through the high window easily enough. Inspired, he dashed off a paragraph which created a strong nylon rope of the kind used by mountaineers. He quickly secured the typewriter to one end and began lowering it down outside, but almost immediately the extreme height and the air currents playing around the top of the tower caused the burden at the rope's end to crash again and again into the outside wall. George could hear broken-off typewriter parts clattering down the cliff. Hastily, he hauled the typewriter up again, hand over hand, before something vital was knocked off. He had gotten the message. The tower and the typewriter were inseparable.

It was a disappointment, but sitting there at his desk, considering all that had happened, George found himself not nearly so downcast as he might have expected to be. Curiously, he was instead more inclined to put aside the concerns of the world over which he had dominion and to think of Peggy, remembering fondly now her loyalty, her buoyancy in crises, and above all, her liveliness. Come to think of it, never in all their years together had Peggy been so unresponsive to a tender advance as Lorelei. The two women were fire and ice, he decided; between Lorelei and

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Peggy lay all the myriad and subtle shadings which separate the words "damsel" from "wench," and there was no doubt now about where his sympathies lay. George really missed Peggy. He missed the kids rocketing around the house and, in moderation, the in-laws. He even missed old Culp and the creative-writing class.

Nostalgically then, but without losing any time, George created a Listerine bottle and some contents, which he drank.

Peggy said something wry and offhand about George's latest three-day stay on the sunporch and then did not mention his disappearance again, even when it became clear that whatever had happened there had vastly improved his state of mind at last.

For George was a different man, different even from the much younger George Mapstead of before the breakdown.

In the middle of that very afternoon he cornered Peggy in their bedroom and kissed her on the ear. She giggled in surprise and they fell together across the bed without bothering to close the door or take the phone off the hook.

On Saturday morning George volunteered to take the children to the zoo. The following Monday he dropped around at the gas company and told the manager he felt like coming back to work any time they wanted him. The manager pumped George's hand and said fine, only just so as to be sure George wasn't rushing things, how about the beginning of the month?

And finally there was the day Peggy's bachelor uncle, who had been laid off at the plastics factory, phoned up and suggested he move in with the Mapsteads for a few weeks while he looked around. George turned the uncle down flat and hung up to discover Peggy looking at him with admiring approval.

At no point did George feel he had overcome in his old struggle to get really in command of his life, but at least this was better. The doctor must have been right about therapy then, if this was what therapy could do.

But then Peggy discovered her husband wasn't writing any more, and she asked him about it.

"I've given it up for a while," George explained. "I don't seem to need a hobby so much now." Even as he spoke, however, he remembered something and added, "Since you mention it, though, there is one little job I ought to do. I have to tie up some loose ends."

He left the house, reappeared half an hour later with a package, and closed himself onto the sunporch.

They were in much the same

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condition as when he had first seen them from the tower, the two undistinguished and indistinguishable males—he had never gotten around to shaping them up after all—moping along at a worm's pace behind the listless Lorelei, all of them helpless without him. Looking down, George wondered how he could have expended so much of his precious creative energy on them and their petty adolescent problems, their idyllic but utterly pointless lives, if lives they were.

If he ever wrote again, the characters would be more mature. A political novel, maybe, set in Washington. The story of an honest man with a pure heart who rises to the top despite pitfalls laid for him by jealous, ruthless, and less worthy men. (He must remember, when he got back, to have a look in the library to see if this book had ever been done.)

But he had this job to finish up first.

George decided on a course which he felt would be the cleanest, swiftest, and ultimately the least cruel under the circumstances. It had the further virtue of conviction, since it was in keeping with the rest of the story and not dependent on the deus ex machina, a device Culp had cautioned against in class. Besides all this, the method would be self-solving in the matter of disposal.

Briskly he ground fresh paper into the machine and wrote without pause: "Just beyond the meadow the terrain turned muddy, widening into a treacherous slough. Seeking marsh grasses for a bouquet, Lorelei ventured into the bog and was trapped by a pool of quicksand. Both Curtis and Ralph tried to rescue her, but these attempts were doomed and the three perished together."

Before he could look from the window a hideous scream rose from the land below the tower, followed by another, and another, and another. It was terrible. George shuddered and closed his ears by burying his head in his arms and hunching over the typewriter. He waited. After a long time he rose and looked out. Everything was quiet again.

He turned back to the typewriter and set about removing the insects from the grass, the grass from the meadow, the leaves from the trees, the trees from the earth. He was very thorough, trying hard not to forget anything. As a special precaution, he kept turning to look out at his handiwork, or rather his cancellation of his handiwork, until at last the plain below the tower was totally barren, as it was in the beginning. There was not even the breeze, which he had remembered to turn off.

As a dramatic ending—every story needs one—George heaved

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up the old L. C. Smith off the desk and pitched it out the tower window. It struck and burst splendidly, even gloriously, its million flying parts pocking the distant brown dirt for yards around.

Omnipotent George Mapstead sighed and smiled, thinking of Peggy and home. Preparing to abandon his abandoned world, George suddenly realized that he never could. He had forgotten to create the Listerine bottle.

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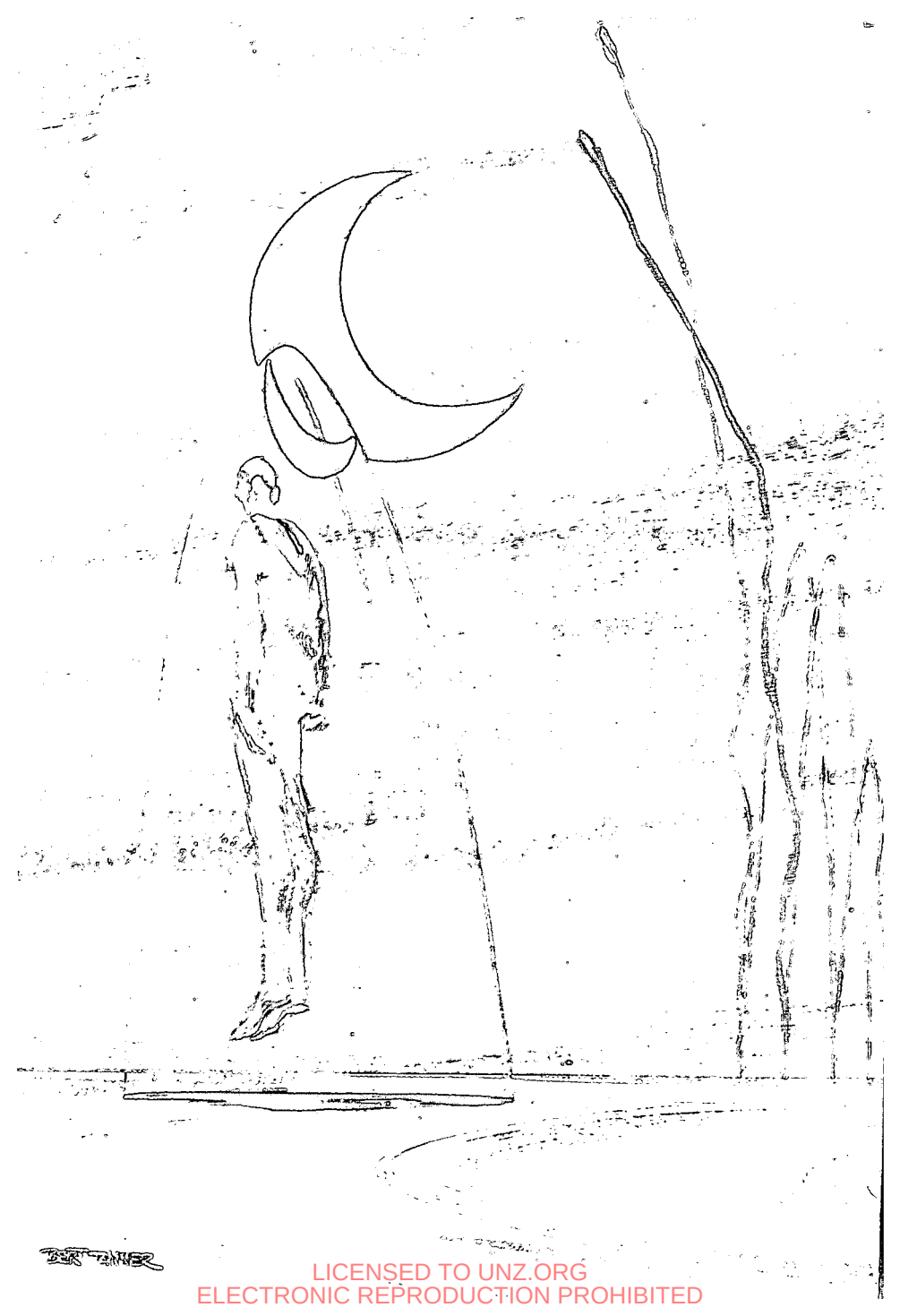

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